

# Red Flag Symptoms

Cancer can present with a variety of non-specific symptoms, many of which may also be suggestive of other non-cancerous healthcare conditions. This factsheet has been created to give an overview of symptoms which patients may present with which would require further investigation by their GP.

Early identification of cancer is one of the most important interventions to improve patients' treatment outcomes. Patients with symptoms should be encouraged to seek medical advice.



## Symptoms

### Non-Specific Symptoms

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Unexplained weight loss - more than 5% of the patient's normal weight within 3 months
- Unexplained appetite loss
- New, unexplained lumps not normal for the patient
- Unexplained bleeding
- Night sweats – may be a symptom of blood cancer, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet
- Unexplained and persistent or recurrent infections - may be a symptom of blood cancer, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet
- Persistent fatigue - may be a symptom of blood cancer, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet
- Persistent, recurrent unexplained bruising - may be a symptom of blood cancer, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet

### Bladder

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Blood in the patient's urine
- Recurrent urinary tract infections or where they do not resolve after antibiotics
- Repeated purchase of medications to treat cystitis e.g. Potassium citrate
- Changes to how often the patient urinates for more than 4 weeks
- Dark coloured urine

### Bowels – please refer to the bowel cancer factsheet

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Blood in their stool
- Change in bowel habit
- Persistent and unexplained abdominal pain
- Stools which are lighter, or darker than normal
- Repeated purchase of medications to treat changes in bowel function e.g loperamide, senna

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## Symptoms

### Breasts – please refer to the breast cancer factsheet

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Unexplained lumps under the armpits
- Unexplained lumps, bumps, dimples or growing veins in breast tissue
- Unexplained discharge or crust from one nipple or sunken appearance
- Unexplained skin changes – texture (orange peel), red or hot, appearance of sores, thickening

### Children

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- New onset squint (lazy) eye
- Persistent, recurrent unexplained bruising
- Blood in their urine
- Fever
- Persistent headaches
- Weight loss
- Unexplained and persistent or recurrent infections
- Persistent tiredness

Parents/carers are likely to have an insight into the child's symptoms relative to their normal behaviour. Consider referring children whose parents have persistent concerns about their symptoms

### Female Reproductive Organs

- Please note that this includes all patients registered female at birth (i.e. cisgender women, transgender men, non-binary people)

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Fluid collection around the lower abdomen
- Unexplained bleeding in the urine or from the genitalia
- Unexplained and persistent pelvic/abdominal pain for more than 2 weeks
- Any new or unexplained lumps around the genitalia
- Feeling constantly bloated, swollen tummy or feeling full quickly when eating
- Needing to pee more often than usual

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### Head, Neck and Mouth

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Persistent and unexplained hoarseness
- An unexplained lump in the neck
- Unexplained ulceration in the oral cavity for more than 3 weeks
- Persistent red or white patch(es) in the mouth lasting more than 2 weeks
- Yellowing of the whites of their eyes
- Repeated purchase of throat lozenges

### Lungs – please refer to the Lung cancer factsheet

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Cough which lasts for more than 3 weeks
- Recurrent chest infections
- Coughing up blood in sputum
- Getting out of breath more easily – especially if doing activities which haven't previously made them out of breath
- Repeated purchase of cough medications

### Male Reproductive Organs

- Please note that this includes all patients registered male at birth (i.e. cisgender men, transgender women, non-binary people)

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Any new or unexplained lumps around the testicles or other parts of the genitalia
- Change in size, shape or texture of the testicles
- Changes to urination (please refer to prostate cancer factsheet)
- Unexplained bleeding in the urine or from the genitalia
- Intermittent groin/loin pain

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## Symptoms

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### Skin

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Changes in the size, shape or colour of an existing mole
- Appearance of a new mole where there wasn't one previously
- Moles which are itchy or bleed
- Pallor – skin may appear to be paler than normal (may be more difficult to discern in black and South East Asian patients). May be a symptom of blood cancers, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet
- A new lump or discoloured patch of skin – these may appear quickly or may progress over months or years
- Persistent, recurrent unexplained bruising - may be a symptom of blood cancers, please refer to the haematology cancer factsheet

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### Stomach

Patients with any of the following symptoms should be referred to their GP for review

- Difficulty swallowing – especially if different from normal
- Acid reflux which doesn't respond to treatment
- Vomiting for 3 weeks or more
- Not eating or not feeling hungry for more than 1 week
- Persistent abdominal pain
- Repeated purchase of acid reflux treatments e.g. gaviscon, omeprazole

Please be aware that these symptoms may, or may not, be caused by cancer but should be investigated to help diagnose patients with other conditions which also require treatment.

Please advise patients who do not meet the criteria for urgent, or non-urgent review by a GP to come back to a pharmacy for further advice if the symptoms do not resolve within a further 7 days.

Please refer to the Let's Communicate Cancer e-learning programme for further training resources for pharmacy staff regarding cancer, its management and the role of pharmacy staff.

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