

## Symptoms of oesophageal cancer

The most common symptoms of oesophageal cancer include:

- difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- unexplained weight loss
- indigestion or heartburn that doesn't go away
- pain in your throat or behind your breastbone

There are many other conditions that cause these symptoms. Most of them are much more common than oesophageal cancer.

You should see your doctor if you have difficulty swallowing, or you have symptoms that are unusual for you or that won't go away. Your symptoms are unlikely to be cancer but it is important to get them checked by a doctor.

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### Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

You may feel pain or a burning sensation when you swallow. Or your food may stick in your throat or chest.

These are the most common symptoms of oesophageal cancer.

A harmless narrowing of the oesophagus called a stricture can also make it difficult for you to swallow. It is important to get this symptom checked by your doctor.

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### Weight loss

Unexplained weight loss means losing weight without meaning to.

You may be put off eating if you find it hard to swallow or have pain when you swallow your food. This can also make you lose weight.

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### Indigestion or heartburn that don't go away

You can get indigestion when acid from your stomach goes back up (refluxes) into the oesophagus. Or when the stomach is inflamed or irritated.

Remember that indigestion is common and it's not usually caused by cancer. It can be very painful, even when there's nothing seriously wrong. See your doctor if these symptoms don't go away. Also talk to your doctor if anything you take for indigestion stops working.

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## Pain in your throat or behind your breastbone

You may feel pain in the centre of your chest, or more rarely in your back or between your shoulder blades. This can get worse when you swallow or have indigestion.

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## Other symptoms

Other symptoms can include:

### Food coming back up

You may regurgitate food – this is when food comes back up soon after you swallow it.

### A cough that won't go away

A cough that won't go away or that happens when you try to eat can be caused by oesophageal cancer.

### Hoarseness

Your voice can become raspy or croaky. It's not a common symptom and can be caused by other harmless conditions.

### Coughing up blood

You may cough up blood or have blood in your vomit (or food that you bring back up) if your oesophagus is bleeding. This isn't common.

### Dark poo

Your poo may be darker – almost black – if cancer is making your oesophagus bleed. This is uncommon. You can get darker poo if you're taking iron tablets.

### Tiredness

You might feel tired for no obvious reason if you have oesophageal cancer.

If your oesophagus is bleeding, you might have a reduced number of red blood cells (anaemia). This can also make you feel tired.

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## **We couldn't do this life saving work without your help**

Lifestyle changes could prevent 4 in 10 cases of cancer. So we're funding prevention research to help people make good choices.

[Donate to oesophageal cancer research](#)

## **Related links**

### **Referral to a specialist for symptoms of oesophageal cancer**

Your GP should refer you to a specialist if your symptoms could be due to oesophageal cancer.

### **Tests for oesophageal cancer**

You might have one or more of these tests to find out the cause of your symptoms, or to find out the size of your cancer and whether it has spread.

### **Risks and causes of oesophageal cancer**

Factors that increase the risk of oesophageal cancer include being older or overweight, smoking and drinking alcohol, and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease.

## What is oesophageal cancer?

Oesophageal cancer is a cancer of the food pipe. The food pipe is also called the oesophagus or gullet and is part of the digestive system.

## Screening for oesophageal cancer

There is no national screening programme for oesophageal cancer in the UK. But you may have tests or treatment if you are at an increased risk of developing it.

## Oesophageal cancer main page

Oesophageal cancer starts in the food pipe, also known as your oesophagus or gullet. The oesophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach.

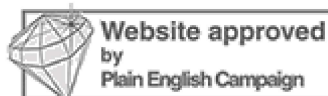


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