

Persistent heartburn may be a sign of cancer, campaign warns

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People with persistent heartburn are being urged to visit their GP as it may be a sign of cancer, according to a new campaign by Public Health England (PHE).

Heartburn is a burning [chest pain](#) or discomfort, which is usually worse after eating.

Although most people experience occasional [heartburn](#), those suffering

from heartburn most days over an extended period – three weeks or more – are being advised to visit their doctor.

The new 'Be Clear on Cancer' campaign highlights two possible symptoms of oesophageal or [stomach cancer](#) – collectively known as oesophago-gastric cancers – persistent heartburn or difficulty swallowing food.

Cancer Research UK's [early diagnosis](#) manager, Matthew Wickenden, stressed that while the chances that these symptoms are cancer are low, it's still important to visit the doctor to get them checked.

Figures released by Public Health England showed that more than half (55 per cent) of people would not visit their GP if they were experiencing heartburn for three weeks or more, while less than one in five (15 per cent) people were certain that heartburn was a sign of cancer.

Other signs of oesophageal or stomach cancer include:

- indigestion on and off for three weeks or more
- feeling food sticking in your throat when you swallow
- losing weight for no obvious reason
- trapped wind and frequent burping
- feeling full very quickly when eating
- nausea or vomiting
- pain or discomfort in top of stomach

Experts backing the campaign stressed that diagnosing cancer earlier is "absolutely critical" to giving patients a better chance of surviving the disease.

"Campaigns such as these can have an important role to play in efforts to

reduce the number of people diagnosed with cancer at a late stage," added Wickenden.

Professor Michael Griffin, Professor of Surgery from the Northern Oesophago-gastric Unit, also welcomed the campaign: "You won't be wasting your doctor's time - you will either get reassurance that it isn't cancer, or if it is, you will have a better chance of successful treatment."

If diagnosed early, around two out of three people (67 per cent) will survive oesophago-gastric cancers for at least five years. But if diagnosed at a later stage there is only a three per cent chance that the patient will survive for at least five years after diagnosis.

Sean Duffy, National Clinical Director for Cancer at NHS England, said: "Early diagnosis is a key focus for us and will form part of the NHS's new five year strategy for [cancer](#), currently being developed by an independent taskforce."

Research (link is external) has shown that around 950 lives could be saved each year if survival for oesophago-gastric cancers matched the best in Europe.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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