

# Public urged to be more body vigilant in fight against cancer, new study finds

December 7 2016

---

New research published in *BMC Public Health* has found that increased body vigilance may contribute to early cancer diagnosis.

In the first study of its kind, researchers from the University of Surrey who received funding from Cancer Research UK, found that people who are more body vigilant were more likely to seek professional medical help.

Unlike previous research in this area which mainly focuses on the time from perceiving a reason to contact a healthcare professional to first consultation, this study examines patients' attentiveness to their bodies and their readiness to contact medical professionals.

During the study, a sample group of over 2,000 people aged 50 and over were asked whether they had experienced one or more of 14 ['cancer alarm symptoms'](#) over the previous three months. Almost half the sample (46%) reported experiencing at least once cancer alarm symptom in this time period.

The most commonly reported symptoms were:

- Persistent cough or hoarseness (23%)
- Changes in bowel habits (18%)
- Constant change in bladder habits (17%)

Only 63% of those who reported these frequently associated symptoms

of cancer, sought help from a medical professional. The study found that those who were more body vigilant were significantly more likely to have sought help for at least one 'cancer alarm' symptom. Unemployed and retired people were also more likely to have sought help.

Cancer that is diagnosed at an early stage is more likely to be treated successfully saving lives. Research from Cancer Research UK has found that 46% of all patients with cancer in England have their disease diagnosed when it has already reached an advanced stage.

Lead author of the report, Dr Katriina Whitaker from the University of Surrey said: "In order to prevent the number of deaths in England from cancer, we need people to identify and understand changes in their bodies and not delay seeking medical help.

"Far too many cases of cancer are diagnosed at a late stage which severely reduces chances of survival. In this study 27% of those questioned had not yet sought medical advice on symptomatic signs of cancer which is very worrying."

Dr Jana Witt, Cancer Research UK's health information officer, said: "There's no need to check yourself for cancer in a set way or at a set time, but it's important to pay attention to your body and get to know what's normal for you.

"It can be easy to put something new or different about your [body](#) down to things like getting older, but if you notice any unusual or persistent changes, it's important to go and see your doctor.

"It's more likely to be something less serious than cancer, but it's better to get checked out. When cancer is diagnosed at an [early stage](#), treatment is more likely to be successful."

**More information:** Kelly Winstanley et al. The impact of body vigilance on help-seeking for cancer 'alarm' symptoms: a community-based survey, *BMC Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-016-3846-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3846-7)

Provided by University of Surrey

Citation: Public urged to be more body vigilant in fight against cancer, new study finds (2016, December 7) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-12-urged-body-vigilant-cancer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.