

Why finding cancer early is so important

No one wants to think about having cancer. It's too serious, too upsetting, too *big*. Most days you probably feel okay – and anyway, who has time?

But no matter how healthy you feel or how busy you are, you need to take the time. Did you know that thousands of women beat cancer every year, either because they've seen their doctor for a routine checkup, followed screening guidelines or told their doctor about a change to their body?

- When cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is often simpler and more likely to be successful.
- Finding cancer early means that there is less chance that the disease has spread to another part of your body.
- When you find cancer early, you have a better chance of surviving. It means that it can be treated earlier – and maybe stopped.



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What needs to get checked

A change to your body or how you feel may mean that something is wrong. Only you know what's normal for you – so tell a doctor if you notice any of these warning signs:

- a new or unusual lump or swelling in the breast or any other body part
- a sore that doesn't heal on your body or in your mouth
- a change in the shape, size or colour of a mole or wart
- a cough, hoarseness or a croaky voice that doesn't go away
- problems swallowing
- blood in the urine, stool or mucus
- unusual bleeding or discharge from the nipple or vagina
- changes in bladder habits, such as pain or problems urinating
- a change in bowel habits (constipation or diarrhea) that lasts more than a few weeks
- indigestion that doesn't go away
- unexplained weight loss, fever or fatigue
- unexplained aches and pains
- any new skin growth or areas of skin that bleed, itch or become red

Don't delay – report it right away

Having any of these signs doesn't mean that you have cancer. They may be due to some other medical problem, or they may not be serious at all. Only a doctor can tell for sure.

You have nothing to lose by getting a change checked by a doctor, except the time that it takes you to go.



Common excuses

“ *I don't feel sick, so this change can't be anything to worry about.* ”

Let a doctor decide. When cancer first develops, you may feel fine. Better to find out now that it's “nothing” than to wish later that you'd seen your doctor.

“ *I'm sure this will just go away on its own – there's no need to bother my doctor about it.* ”

Many people hope that a change will just go away. Weeks may go by, but the health issue is still around. If it doesn't go away quickly, you need to tell your doctor about it.

“ *There's no way I have cancer because no one in my family has ever had it.* ”

Cancer can happen to anyone at any age. If you're the first person in your family with cancer, give yourself the best chance for survival by getting it diagnosed early.

Screening

Screening tests can find signs of cancer at a very early stage, before you even notice a change to your body that might be cancer.

Breast cancer

If you're 40 to 49, talk to your doctor about your risk of breast cancer, along with the risks and benefits of mammography.

If you're 50 to 69, have a mammogram every 2 years.

If you're 70 or older, talk to your doctor about how often you should have a mammogram.

Cervical cancer

If you've ever been sexually active, you should start having regular Pap tests by the time you're 21. You'll need a Pap test every 1 to 3 years, depending on your previous test results.

Colorectal cancer

If you're 50 or older, have a stool test at least every 2 years. A stool test is a fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT).

Ask your doctor about these tests. The short time it takes to have one could save your life.

Find out more

As advances in research are made, we continue to learn more about how to detect cancer early, when treatment is more likely to be successful.

Contact us for the most up-to-date information. It could save your life.

- Call us toll-free Monday to Friday at 1-888-939-3333 (TTY 1-866-786-3934). If you need help in another language, interpreters are available.
- Email info@cis.cancer.ca.
- Visit cancer.ca.
- Contact your local Canadian Cancer Society office.

Our services are free and confidential.



What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer and our services or to make a donation.



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

1 888 939-3333 | cancer.ca
TTY 1 866 786-3934

PREVENTING CANCER

Get involved **Live well** Be aware Get involved
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This is general information developed by the Canadian Cancer Society. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider.

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Finding Cancer Early

What women need to know

