

Dr Jane Scott



**Tell your
doctor**

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days for three
weeks or more?
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**BE CLEAR
ON CANCER**

NHS Be Clear on Cancer

Heartburn most days for three weeks or more? Tell your doctor.

Let's be clear about cancer of the oesophagus and stomach

The oesophagus (more commonly known as the gullet or food pipe), is the long tube that carries food from the throat to the stomach. Cancer of the oesophagus is also called 'oesophageal cancer'. Sometimes oesophageal and stomach cancers are known as 'oesophago-gastric cancer'.

There are around 12,900 new cases of these two cancers in England every year. Together, they cause over 10,200 deaths. Both cancers affect men and women, but are more common in men. More than nine out of ten people who get cancer of the oesophagus or stomach are over 50.

If you notice any of the symptoms, tell your doctor straight away. It might not be anything serious, but if it is cancer, then finding it early makes it more treatable.

Let's be clear about how to spot it

See your doctor straight away if you've had **heartburn most days for 3 weeks or more**. Even if you're taking medicine and it seems to help, you still need to see your doctor if you have heartburn for most days.

Other symptoms of oesophageal or stomach cancer may include:

- Indigestion on and off for 3 weeks or more
- Food feels like it's sticking in your throat when you swallow
- Losing weight for no obvious reason
- Trapped wind and frequent burping
- Feeling full very quickly when eating
- Feeling bloated after eating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pain or discomfort in your upper tummy area

Let's be clear about how important it is to see your doctor

You're not wasting anyone's time by getting your symptoms checked out, so make that trip to your doctor's surgery. If it's nothing to worry about, your mind will be put at rest. But if it is cancer of the oesophagus or stomach, early detection makes it easier to treat. Seeing your doctor without delay may save your life.

Having symptoms doesn't mean it's cancer

Perhaps it's a sign of another condition, which may need treating? Find out for sure by visiting your surgery.

If you know anyone who has any of the symptoms described in this leaflet, tell them they should see their doctor.

You can find your doctor's contact details online at **[nhs.uk/ogcancer](https://www.nhs.uk/ogcancer)**

Let's be clear about how seeing your doctor early could save your life

Here are some real life stories.

Denise Tapson, aged 64 says:

I first started having difficulty swallowing my food in August 2009, when I choked on a piece of sausage. When I told my doctor my symptoms, he sent me for tests at the local hospital. I was diagnosed with cancer. But I had an operation in January 2010, and chemotherapy, and by May that year my treatment had finished. I can still do most of the things I did before, including playing with my young grandchildren.

Alan Bainbridge, aged 71 says:

I had heartburn on holiday and I've never been troubled by it before. I thought I was just eating too much but it carried on when we came home so my wife made a doctor's appointment for me. I was shocked when I was told it was cancer but thanks to my early diagnosis I've made a full recovery.

We have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I can't imagine missing out on this phase of my life. Going to the doctor straight away was the best thing I ever did.

Let's be clear about how to reduce your chances of getting these cancers

Stop smoking

It's never too late to quit. No matter what age you stop smoking, it reduces your chances of developing cancer and makes a real difference to your health in general. There's plenty of support and help available from the NHS. Visit nhs.uk/smokefree, call **0300 123 1044** or textphone **0300 123 1014**.

Look after yourself

If you're overweight, you can lose weight by combining a calorie-controlled diet with regular exercise. Swimming, cycling, dancing – the more you can do, the better. Even walking to your local shops instead of taking the bus can make a difference.

Eat healthily

Try to get your 5-a-day. So eat more vegetables, fruit, fish and wholegrain foods. Eat less fattening foods like cakes and pastries and fewer processed meats like bacon and ham.

Cut back on drinking alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can lead to a number of health problems and is linked with cancer. By drinking less, you'll reduce your health risks.

Unclear on anything? Then visit nhs.uk/ogcancer

This leaflet is available in other formats from the website **nhs.uk/ogcancer** or from Public Health England – please email **enquiries@phe.gov.uk**

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