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# Ovarian cancer: How GPs can help with the campaign

[naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian](http://naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian)

**The NHS is piloting a local campaign to raise awareness of persistent bloating as a symptom of ovarian cancer. Being prepared is vital.**

## What is Be Clear on Cancer?

Be Clear on Cancer aims to improve early diagnosis of cancer by raising awareness of symptoms and encouraging people to see their GP earlier.

The Department of Health prioritises cancer types based on the number of deaths that could be avoided if survival rates matched the best in Europe. It then reviews the latest evidence and engages with experts to develop key messages for the campaigns, testing them locally and regionally, before they are rolled out nationally.

## What is the campaign's key message?

The message for women is: **Feeling bloated, most days, for three weeks or more could be a sign of ovarian cancer.**

## Who is it aimed at?

All women aged 50 and over, the age group most at risk of developing ovarian cancer, and their key influencers, such as friends and family.

## Why focus on persistent 'bloating'?

Focusing on just one key symptom keeps the message simple and direct. The Department of Health consulted with experts and clinicians who felt that, of the symptoms highlighted in the recent [NICE guidelines](#), persistent abdominal distension (women often refer to this as 'bloating') was the most important predictor of ovarian cancer.

## Why does the campaign say 'most days, for three weeks or more'?

It is essential to highlight the importance of persistence and frequency of bloating as part of the campaign message. When it was tested with GPs and the target audience, women felt the campaign needed to clearly explain how long they should wait before going to see their GP.

The Department of Health wanted to use everyday language, so the description in the NICE guidelines (more than 12 times per month) was reworded to reflect how women would describe persistent bloating. But continue to use your clinical judgment when women present with symptoms of bloating to determine whether it is persistent abdominal distension.

## What's happening in your local area and when?

Local NHS teams are working with the Department of Health to develop a range of activities aimed at reaching women in your communities. Individual activities vary across each of the local pilots, but will include media such as local press and radio in some areas and community-based outreach work in others. These will be taking place from 14 January to mid-March 2013.

**'Bloating was the main symptom for me but I put it down to getting older. I pointed it out to my sister and she urged me to see a GP. My advice to anyone with persistent bloating is to take yourself straight to the doctor.'**

Lou Pescod, aged 65, cancer survivor and supporter of Ovarian Cancer Action

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## More about ovarian cancer

- **Around 5,800 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer in England each year – around 4,750 of whom (more than 80%) are aged 50 and over**
- **More than 3,350 women aged 50 and over die from ovarian cancer in England every year**
- **Over 90% of all women diagnosed with the earliest stage ovarian cancer (stage I) survive for at least five years. This figure is 5% for women diagnosed with the most advanced stage disease (stage IV)**

**'It's great that this Be Clear on Cancer campaign is raising awareness of ovarian cancer – this will make a difference to patients' chances of having successful treatment and their overall experience. Women often experience a complicated pattern of symptoms that can be difficult to identify. It will boost women's confidence, making them feel more comfortable talking to their doctor. I'd strongly encourage local GPs to be prepared for the campaign, remind themselves of the updated NICE guidelines and to make use of the range of diagnostic tests available to them.'**

Dr Anant Sachdev, GP from Berkshire

## Reminders

**You might find it helpful to keep these reminders about signs and symptoms and referrals easily accessible throughout the campaign.**

### Ovarian cancer symptoms

NICE guidelines highlight the following symptoms on a 'persistent or frequent basis':

- persistent abdominal distension (women often refer to this as 'bloating')
- feeling full (early satiety) and/or loss of appetite
- pelvic or abdominal pain
- increased urge to urinate and/or frequency

### Assessment and referral

There is [information to support you](#) with the diagnosis of cancer. The recent [NICE guidelines](#) recommend carrying out diagnostic tests, including measuring serum CA125 in primary care and arranging an ultrasound scan of the abdomen and pelvis as appropriate.

Continue to use your clinical judgement and, remember, if physical examination identifies ascites and/or a pelvic or abdominal mass (which is not obviously uterine fibroids) you can refer urgently under the two-week wait referral system.

Cancer Networks are working with local NHS teams to prepare for and monitor any increases in referrals.

Other useful resources include a NICE accredited online learning tool, '[Recognising early symptoms of ovarian cancer](#)'; a toolkit for GPs, '[Improving Diagnosis of Cancer](#)'; and '[Direct access to diagnostic tests for cancer: best practice referral pathways for general practitioners](#)'.

### What to expect during the campaign

The Department of Health is initially launching the ovarian cancer campaign at a local level so that it can assess the

extent of its impact on primary and secondary care on a relatively small scale.

Previous Be Clear on Cancer campaigns have shown that you're unlikely to be overwhelmed. But you may see more women coming to your practice with the symptom of persistent bloating as a result of local activities, possibly a few weeks into the campaign.

The national Be Clear on Cancer bowel campaign, which ran from January to March 2012, equated to an increase of one patient with relevant symptoms per practice every two weeks. That campaign focused on a more common cancer and included TV advertising.

### Three things you can do to help

**1 Be mindful.** This campaign may prompt women who've previously ignored persistent bloating to come and see you. Women may worry they're wasting your time, be afraid of what you might find or find it difficult to communicate their symptoms.

**2 Work with your local NHS team.** [Your Cancer Network](#) can tell you everything you need to know about activity planned in your area. Also, they may need your support to evaluate the impact of the campaign so it's helpful to keep in touch.

**3 Encourage your colleagues to support the campaign.** Practice nurses, receptionists and practice managers all have an important role to play in this campaign. [There's a separate briefing sheet for practice teams](#). Ensure everyone is briefed, so they can support it.

### Find out more

- **Information and resources for practice teams are available at:**  
[www.naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian](http://www.naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian)
- **From January, the public-facing website for Be Clear on Cancer is**  
[www.nhs.uk/persistentbloating](http://www.nhs.uk/persistentbloating)