

# Cancer can affect any lesbian, what do you know about it?

Over 178,000 women are diagnosed with cancer in the UK every year, approximately 5,000 are lesbian or bisexual. Cancer affects women of all ages. This leaflet gives an introduction to some of the common ones that affect women.

**There are many types of cancer, some are linked with smoking, alcohol use, sexually transmitted diseases and whether or not you've had children.**

Most cancers present with early symptoms and through knowing those symptoms you can get tested/investigated early and get treatment.

## Lung Cancer

**Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers and often appears as a cough that goes on for weeks**

sometimes with blood in the sputum, weight loss and loss of appetite and sometimes with a hoarse voice and chest pain.



## Bowel Cancer

Bowel cancer is normally found in older women but there is some evidence that there are things you can do earlier in life that can help reduce your risk of getting it, such as: **doing regular exercise, keeping a healthy body weight, eating lots of fibre, fish and fruit and veg, not eating too much red meat, stopping smoking and not drinking too much.**

If bowel cancer is detected early then lots of people can be cured. If you have any of the following symptoms for more than a month then get checked out:

- **Persistent change in bowel habit - going a lot more frequently than normal?**
- **Bleeding for no apparent reason from your bottom?**
- **A lump in your abdomen or unexplained tummy pain?**

From 2007 women aged over 60yrs will be offered screening for bowel cancer, screening saves lives so if you get an invite, take the test.

## Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer is the 4th most common cancer in women. **The early symptoms of ovarian cancer include ongoing lower abdominal pain and constant bloated feeling.** In later stages it can cause irregular periods, constipation, loss of appetite, pain during sex. The symptoms of ovarian cancer are often vague but if you are concerned then it is important to get them checked out early.

## Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women and accounts for 1 in 3 cancers diagnosed in women, there are some studies that suggest that the rates are even higher in lesbians. There are lots of risk factors for breast cancer, including having a family history of breast cancer, having few or no children, starting your periods early, having a late menopause.

**There is a link between breast cancer and being overweight and drinking alcohol and taking hormones such as the pill or HRT.**

Although many of the symptoms can be caused by other things, if you have these symptoms it's important to get them checked out early:

- **Change in shape, lumps, or puckering of the skin of your breast, or changes in your nipple**
- **Bloody discharge from your nipple**
- **Swelling or lump in your arm pit**

Testing for breast cancer can involve xrays or scans of the breast and sometimes blood tests and taking cells from the breast. Early treatment for breast cancer is really important in helping women survive for longer, so if you're worried, see a healthcare professional.

## Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer kills about 1000 women each year in the UK. It can be treated if it is detected early through cervical cancer screening, ie. a smear. There is some evidence that the virus HPV which is associated with cervical cancer can be transmitted through lesbian sex, therefore even if you think you are at very low risk you should get a smear when you are sent the invitation letter.

## Be body aware...

- Only you know what your body feels like, **get used to examining yourself**
- **Know what signs to look out for**
- If you think that something has changed, **get it checked out by your GP or practice nurse**
- **Early diagnosis saves lives**

This leaflet is one in a series produced by Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust. Others in the series cover topics including:

- Breast Cancer
- Cervical Cancer
- Lung Cancer
- Bowel Cancer
- Men and Cancer
- Women and Cancer
- Gays and Cancer
- Lesbians and Cancer
- Facts about Cancer



For further copies of these leaflets, please contact the Health Improvement Directorate at Barking and Dagenham PCT

## For more information, check out the following...

**CANCER RESEARCH UK**  
[www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)  
Freephone 0800 CANCER  
(0800 226237)

**ROY CASTLE LUNG  
CANCER FOUNDATION**  
[www.roycastle.org](http://www.roycastle.org)  
Helpline: 0800 358 7200

**NHS DIRECT**  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) - 0845 4647

**CANCER BACKUP**  
[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)

**BREAST CANCER CARE**  
[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

**JO TRUST (cervical cancer)**  
[www.jotrust.co.uk](http://www.jotrust.co.uk)

For further copies of these leaflets, or if you would like information on audio-tape or in large print, please contact us at the address below:

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[www.gladd.org.uk](http://www.gladd.org.uk)  
[www.healthwithpride.com](http://www.healthwithpride.com)  
[www.lgbthealth.co.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.co.uk)

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Barking and Dagenham **NHS**  
Primary Care Trust

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