



Cancer Awareness in Barnet: Frequently Asked Questions

In May, a new local campaign was launched in Barnet to encourage individuals who have symptoms that may be suggestive of cancer to contact their GP practice.

Delivered by the North Central London Cancer Alliance in collaboration with the NCL Clinical Commissioning Group and council Public Health team, the campaign will also aim to increase the number of people taking part in screening when invited.

Below you can find some of the frequently asked questions we have received from Barnet residents this year.

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Cancer Awareness in Barnet: Frequently Asked Questions

Cancer Awareness

Where can I find out more information about other types of cancer for which there is no screening, and is this information available in 'easy read' and other languages?

For more information on other types of cancer for which there is no screening, please visit: [Cancer Research](#)

Should I be checking myself for symptoms every day?

It's good to be aware of what your body is normally like, so it's easier to notice if anything changes. But there's no good evidence to suggest that regularly self-checking any part of your body in a set time or set way is helpful. It can actually do more harm than good, by picking up things which wouldn't have gone on to cause you problems.

Where are the best places for more information on symptoms?

Please visit:

- [smallc](#)
- [Macmillan](#)
- [Cancer Research](#)

What are the most and lesser known causes of cancer in Barnet?

Most known causes in Barnet:

- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Alcohol

Least known:

- Cancer risks in the workplace- People working in some jobs may have a higher risk of some types of cancer.
- Some people have inherited faulty genes that increase their risk of developing particular types of cancer.
- Our natural hormone levels change across our lifetime, because of things like puberty, pregnancy and menopause. Things like the Pill and HRT affect our hormone levels, as well as cancer risk.

Are there certain groups who are less likely to present for cancer symptoms?

Certain male cohorts don't present for prostate screening due to virility fears. Certain female groups don't present due to cultural and religious issues.

Cancer Prevention

How can I reduce my chance of catching cancer?

There are many ways in which we can reduce our chances of catching cancer:

- **Not smoking** is the biggest thing you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. Chemicals in cigarette smoke get into our blood stream and can cause damage around the body. If you smoke, the best thing you can do for your health is quit.
- **Have a healthy balanced diet**- Having healthy food and drink can reduce your risk of cancer. Aim to have plenty of fruit and vegetables, foods high in fibre and healthy proteins. Cut down on processed and red meat, and high calorie foods and drinks.
- **Keep a healthy weight**- Being a healthy weight has lots of benefits, including reducing the risk of cancer. Making small changes can help you to be healthier.
- **Enjoy the sun safely**- Being safe in the sun reduces the risk of skin cancer. When the sun is strong, it is important to protect your skin- spend time in the shade, cover up with clothing, and use sunscreen. Sunburn is a sign your skin has been damaged.
- **Cut back on alcohol**- Drinking less alcohol reduces your risk of cancer. It doesn't matter what type of alcohol it is, it can still lead to damage.
- **Get moving**- Being active is good for you and helps you to be a healthy weight. You don't have to join a gym - things like quick walking and carrying heavy shopping count. If you are very active it reduces your risk of cancer.



Resources available locally to help me reduce my cancer risk?

Royal free website and smallc

Cancer Screening

Do I need to take a Covid test before going for a screening appointment?

No.

Can you take someone with you to a screening or hospital appointment for support?

Staff will be following strict guidance on infection control. This is to protect you and themselves. They will wear extra protective clothing and might ask you to wear a mask and gloves. You also won't be able to take someone with you to your appointment unless you require the support.

Can I ask for reasonable adjustments eg. visiting prior to a screening appointment to ensure where it takes place is suitable for my needs? (eg. ground floor no steps) or longer appointment time?

Under the Equality Act 2010 all public bodies are required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that people with learning disabilities can use their services. You may also ask for reasonable adjustments/visiting screening to suit physical or mental needs.

If I have symptoms and my screening is 6 weeks away, should I wait for the screening?

No, you should go to you GP without delay

What do people do if they want to make or change a screening appointment, and can't get through to anyone?

Please see below for the different types of screening appointments:

- **Breast screening** – You can to make a change to your appointment here.
- **Cervical screening** – Contact your practice or where your appointment is booked at, to make a change.
- **Bowel screening** – If you have a follow-up appointment after completing your bowel screening test kit and need to change your appointment, contact the screening nurses on 020 3447 3202 or the number on your appointment letter.

How have waiting times for screenings and treatment been impacted by Covid and how will the backlog be dealt with?

Cervical, breast and bowel cancer screening programmes are going ahead in the UK. But because of COVID-19, there are delays to some invitations and follow-up appointments.

Screening programmes have resumed, however. All bowel and cervical screening invitations that were delayed have now been sent. The breast screening service is working to send invitations to all delayed women as soon as possible.

- [smallc website](#)

Does breast screening hurt?

Do not worry. The mammography practitioners are used to screening women of all sizes and will do their best to minimise any discomfort.

Where do I have to go for cervical screening?

You'll be sent an invitation letter in the post when it's time to book your screening appointment. Your letter will tell you where you can go for screening and how to book. Most cervical screening is done in a GP surgery by a female nurse or doctor. In some parts of England, you may be able to go to a local sexual health clinic instead. Call your GP surgery to book an appointment with them.



Going to the GP

Because of Covid variants how can I be sure it is safe to attend screenings or hospital appointments?

NHS services have made changes to make sure it's safe for you to be seen during coronavirus (COVID-19). There are also ways to get medical help and prescriptions online or over the phone. Services continue with COVID safety measures. Everyone attending must wear a mask.

Trying to get a GP appointment is even harder than ever; what should I do?

We would advise patients to check with their Surgery regarding the best way to consult, as there are variations between Surgeries in how they are managing appointments. Most appointments are remote at first, but you will get a face to face appointment if needed. There are many ways to book an appointment: Phone/ Online/ E-Consult (please note that not all Surgeries may use e-consult- best to check with your individual surgery)/ NHS 111

More info can be found:

- [smallc website](#)
- [NHS website](#)
- [NCL Cancer Alliance website](#)



Should I use E-Consult to make an appointment? Will that get me seen quicker?

eConsult allows patients to seek advice from their GP surgery or help manage their own condition or symptoms. The fastest way to complete a request will be for the patient to do this themselves online. Once completed, whether online or on the phone, all requests will be reviewed by our clinicians in the same time frame (within 24 hours). Method of contact is not given priority over another.

Diagnosis and Wider Cancer

Does less financial resources because of Covid mean less options for Cancer treatment or some drugs being removed?

There is a whole budget dedicated to cancer. Additional funding has been given and we are always working towards funding for cancer and making sure patients on the waiting list are seen.

What emotional support is available for me/my family if I am diagnosed with cancer?

There are plenty of organisations and services offering support to those affected by cancer. Please visit the following:

- [Macmillan](#)
- [Cancer Research](#)
- [Cancer Well-being London](#)

After a diagnosis what financial help and support is available to me?

Financial support and cancer:

- There are government benefits that you might qualify for if you have cancer or care for someone with cancer.
- Please visit: [Cancer Research](#) or [Macmillan](#) for more info on financial support available to you.

Can Covid make the symptoms or treatment of cancer more difficult?

You are at a higher risk of complications if you have cancer. This is because cancer and its treatment can weaken your immune system and reduce your ability to fight infections. The immune system protects your body against illness and infection caused by viruses like coronavirus.



Questions from Community Barnet Cancer Awareness Event

One of the messages I hear around cancer for young people/children is that it is rare in the age group meaning parents end up with their children getting misdiagnosed. Do you feel that there needs to be a campaign to get GPs to have this at the forefront of their mind rather than at the back especially when cancer symptoms can be explained away with other illnesses?

September childhood cancer awareness event to give more information and we aim to work more with schools and parents. GPs do try to listen to parents as they know their children better, so parents should get in contact with GP or paediatrician and be persistent.

Can appointments for cervical screening be booked via GP website?

For cervical screening it varies from different practices. Breast screening and bowel info gets sent to you.



Why are people reluctant to come forward for screening?

People can be put off screening if they feel they are healthy. It is easy for people to be put off because people are busy, and the process of booking is a lot longer. Patients are reluctant to visit hospital or GP because of Covid due to fear of Covid, and hospitals have reduced capacity.

Has any research been carried out amongst the various cohorts not presenting for screening to identify why they don't present?

The issues were present before Covid, it's too easy to use Covid as an excuse, we know that certain male cohorts don't present for prostate screening due to virility fears. Certain female groups don't present due to cultural and religious issues and lack of information and knowledge about the risk and the procedures themselves.

Does less financial resources because of Covid mean less options for cancer treatment or some drugs being removed?

There is a whole budget dedicated to cancer. Additional funding has been given to support COVID recovery efforts this year and making sure patients on the waiting list are seen in a timely way. Maybe one of the areas that have been hit hard by Covid are the cancer charities such as CRUK, so we are working more innovatively and collaboratively.

What emotional support is available for me/family if diagnosed with cancer?

Emotional support can be accessed from **Macmillan**, through their helplines and other services. You can also contact your GP for more advice. Also, social subscribing service- cancer patients are eligible and entitled to help. There is a Plan to contact all patients to speak about what resources are available.

How have waiting times for screening and treatment been impacted by Covid?

There has been a significant drop in people seeing their GP, and then getting referred for cancer tests – which is now being tackled through the ‘Help Us, Help You’ campaign encouraging people to come forward if they have symptoms. More than 650,000 people with cancer in the UK (22%) have experienced disruption to their cancer treatment or care because of Covid-19.



In practice, getting a GP appointment is harder than ever. What should I do and how will the GP know if they need to see me in person?

GP practices have been open during COVID and patients are strongly encouraged to see their GP for any worrying signs and symptoms. One of the ways they have adapted is using an online booking form called e-Consult which helps them to triage requests. Usually a first appointment will be via telephone or online and the GP can ascertain whether a face to face is required. Or sometimes it may be obvious from the booking form that a face to face is required and so that will be organised and staff follow strict IPC (Infection Prevention & control (i.e. masks, gloves, aprons, distancing etc) guidelines.

Each GP practice may operate slightly differently but these are the general principles followed by all practices.

Patients generally don't like having to discuss their issues with receptionists- it also muddles their roles which they may then extend and apply in the wrong way

We are constantly looking at new ways of doing things, don't have to go through receptions for the e consult and doctors respect that and they call the patients. We do try our best to respect wishes and receptionists are limited to 4 questions which are very vague.

Perhaps more could be done on after care? In particular, blood screening markers such as inflammation markers for prevention of cancers and ways of monitoring conditions as we all don't fit on one box more choices on blood screening

If you have symptoms and your screening is weeks away you should not wait. Contact GP straight away and don't wait. Research is ongoing into other types of tests that could be used to diagnose cancers earlier such as biomarkers. As more tests become fully validated, they will become available for use over time.