

I have blood in my urine - Do I have cancer?

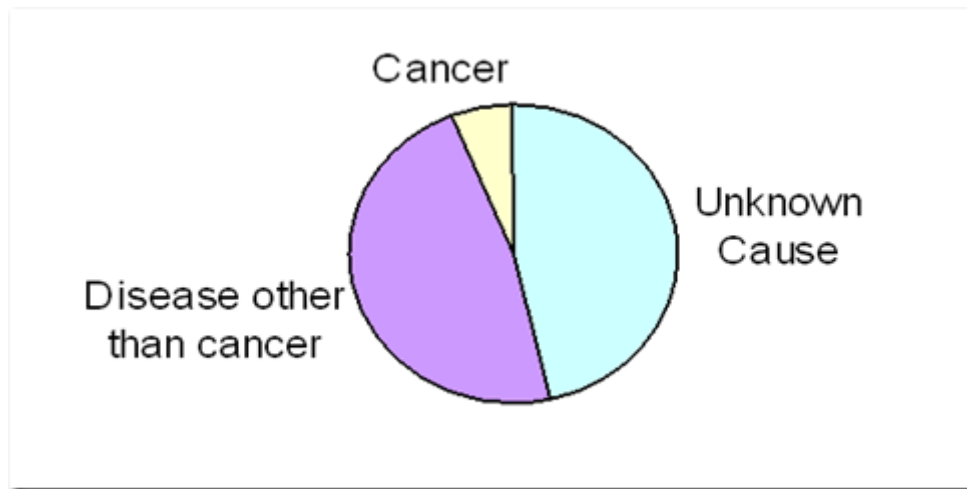
There have been two research studies done, looking at thousand of people to work out how many people with a certain symptom are likely to have cancer. If you are coughing up blood, then you should make an appointment and mention this to your GP. The chances are it's not cancer, but you need to let your GP know.

So, just how many people who cough up blood have cancer? Not many!

	Cause of coughing up blood not known	Coughing up blood caused by a disease other than cancer	Coughing up blood caused by cancer
Percentage of cases	46 %	47 %	6 %
Actual number of people studied (total 4,812)	2,214	2,300	298

The information above can also be shown using a pie chart:

Causes of Coughing Up Blood



* At 3 years from first reporting the symptom (diagnoses of cancer were most often made in the first three months after visiting the GP)

Data from:

Jones *et al* BMJ "*Alarm symptoms in early diagnosis of cancer in primary care cohort study using general practice research database*" (May 2007)

Jones *et al* BMJ "*Alarm symptoms and identification of non-cancer diagnoses in primary care: cohort study*" (August 2009)

So what does this all mean?

Well, the researchers that carried out this study used something called the “UK General Practice Research Database”. They got their information from 128 GP practices in England (we don’t know which practices they looked at for reasons of confidentiality) and looked at the records from December 2000 to January 1994. They looked at how many people, in those 128 GP surgeries had visited their doctor because they were coughing up blood, they then followed the records for three years to find out what happened to them.

In total, they found that 4,812 people went to their doctor because they were coughing up blood, just under half of these people (46 %) never found out the reason this happened to them. Most of the rest of the people (47 %) discovered they had a disease other than cancer. **Very few people who were coughing up blood, 6 % were diagnosed with cancer. Almost all the people with cancer were diagnosed quickly, within the first 3 months of their visit to the doctor.**

Apart from cancer, what else cause you to cough up blood?

Lots of things, which is why it is important to see your GP. Most people who were coughing up blood had a chest infection, this can be treated which is why it is important to see your GP. Some people had Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and some had asthma. Sometimes coughing up blood can be a sign of other problems with your heart or lungs which is why you need to get it checked out.

Sometimes it can be hard to talk to your doctor because you are worried you won’t use the right words. Doctors spend years at medical school learning a whole different language, don’t worry if you don’t know all the correct technical terms, your doctor will be able to figure out what you mean. There are websites that help you say difficult words <http://www.howjsay.com> is a good one.

- [Haemoptysis](#) – is the posh (medical) word for coughing up blood
- [Sputum](#) – is the posh (medical) word for the sticky snot like stuff you cough up (especially in the mornings)
- [pulmonary](#) – means to do with your lungs
- [respiratory](#) – means to do with your breathing

A sample conversation

GP: Hello, what can I do for you today?

You: I’ve had a cough and I’ve noticed I’ve been coughing up blood

If you are worried it might be cancer than you are far better to ask this question outright than go away worrying about it.

You: My father/brother/mother/sister/friend had _____(type of cancer), I am worried that this might be caused by cancer

Your doctor will probably ask you a few questions, so if it helps have a think about them before you go in.

Questions your doctor might ask

- When did it start (last week, last month?) _____
- Do you smoke? _____
- When is it worst? _____
- Are you feeling well otherwise? _____

Notes

Questions you can ask your doctor

- Do I need any tests? _____
- When should I come back? _____
- How do I get my test results? Do I phone? If so, when should I phone?

- How long will the results take? _____
- Do I need a prescription? _____
- Are there any side effects? _____
- Do I need to see a specialist? _____

What if I don't think my GP is taking this seriously?

Go back, doctors aren't mind readers, if it is still a problem, make another appointment. It helps if you can see the same GP again. If you still feel like you are getting nowhere, make an appointment with a different GP and get a second opinion, remember doctors are human too, you might just have caught them on a [bad day](#). The Cancer Research UK website has more information on the NICE guidelines and what you should expect called "[Should I see a lung cancer specialist?](#)" If you still aren't getting anywhere you could contact the [Patient Advice and Liaison Service](#) (PALS) or ask at your GP reception for a comment form.

Notes

Understanding Cancer Ltd are based in the North East of Scotland. We offer courses and tutorials on cancer to the general public and to healthcare professionals.

Understanding Cancer courses are designed and delivered by Avril Morrison a research scientist with a PhD in Cell Biology. Avril has worked for the Association for Cancer Research and the American Institute for Cancer Research on breast cancer, leukaemia and Wilm's tumour. Visit <http://understandingcancer.co.uk> for more information.

Other leaflets are available in this series including "What is a normal blood count"; "I have blood in my poo (stool) - Do I have cancer?" and "I have blood in my urine - Do I have cancer?" please see <http://understandingcancer.co.uk> for further information.

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