



Bladder Cancer Awareness, Risks, Symptoms, and Treatment Options

Daniel Chong, MD

More than 83,000 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with bladder cancer this year, according to the [American Cancer Society](#). While rates of bladder cancer are four times higher in men than in women, bladder cancer affects men and women of all ages and races. However, in recent years, the rates of bladder cancer have been decreasing.

About Bladder Cancer

Bladder cancer is a type of cancer that begins in the cells of the bladder. The most common bladder cancer is urothelial carcinoma, also known as transitional cell carcinoma (TCC). The urothelial cells help the bladder adjust to urine pressure and function as a protective barrier. As cancer cells develop and multiply, they can form a tumor and potentially spread to other parts of the body.

Most bladder cancers are diagnosed at an early stage when the cancer is highly treatable. It's important to note that even after successful treatment, patients may need follow-up testing for years to look for a recurrence of bladder cancer.

[Daniel Chong, MD](#), medical oncologist at [Virginia Cancer Specialists](#), wants to educate patients on their risks, symptoms, and treatment options for bladder cancer. "By helping patients understand the disease and their available treatment options," said Dr. Chong, "we are able to work with them collaboratively to make informed decisions and create better outcomes."

Symptoms of Bladder Cancer

Symptoms of bladder cancer can mimic other medical issues, most commonly the initial stages of a UTI. It's important to see a doctor for diagnosis and follow up if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms of bladder cancer.

Changes in urinary habits:

- Blood in the urine or urine that changes color, such as orange, pink, or dark red
- Pain or burning during urination

- Increased frequency of urination
- Difficulty urinating or having a weak stream
- A sense of urgency even if your bladder is not full
- Urinating frequently throughout the night

Advanced symptoms may include:

- Inability to urinate
- Lower back pain, usually on one side, but sometimes in the center of the back
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Fatigue
- Swelling in the feet
- Bone pain

Changes in urinary habits do not necessarily mean you have bladder cancer. Many of the listed symptoms can indicate other non-cancerous issues or infections. Still, it is important to be aware and speak with your provider about any changes in your health.

Risk Factors for Bladder Cancer

While not all risk factors for bladder cancer can be avoided, there are some lifestyle changes that can help lower your chance of developing bladder cancer in the future. If you're at higher risk due to certain factors, there may be tests available to help detect bladder cancer early, when treatment is most likely to be effective.

Risk factors for developing bladder cancer include:

1. Smoking and tobacco use
2. Being 55+
3. Family history of bladder cancer
4. Born male, especially white
5. Certain genetic mutations
6. Prolonged use of urinary catheters
7. Previous radiation therapy in the pelvic area
8. Drinking water treated with chlorine

Ways to reduce your risk of bladder cancer:

1. Quit smoking and tobacco products.
2. Avoid environmental exposures by minimizing contact with harsh household cleansers and workplace chemicals.
3. Wear protective equipment and work in well-ventilated areas when using toxic products.
4. Drink water throughout the day to flush toxins from your system.
5. Empty your bladder regularly and do not hold your urine.

Tests and Screening for Bladder Cancer

While there are currently no routine screenings for bladder cancer, there are several testing options for patients experiencing symptoms. These testing options include:

- Urine culture to check for infection.
- Urinalysis to measure blood in the urine.
- Urine cytology, which uses a microscope to look for cancer cells in the urine.
- Urine tumor marker test to look for proteins and other substances that may indicate bladder cancer.
- For suspected cases of cancer, a cystoscopy is a lighted cystoscope used to examine the inside of the bladder.
- Computed tomography (CT), MRI, or intravenous pyelogram (IVP) to look for tumors.

While there are additional tests that look for substances in the urine that may indicate bladder cancer, such as chromosome changes or specific proteins, these tests are recommended for those at very high risk, such as:

- People who have had bladder cancer
- Patients born with certain bladder defects
- Employees who have been exposed to certain chemicals

“Researchers are working to improve tests that might detect genetic changes earlier,” said Dr. Chong at Virginia Cancer Specialists. “Until routine screening is available, you should talk with your doctor about your risk factors or if you are experiencing any new or concerning symptoms.”

How Virginia Cancer Specialists Can Help

It’s important to understand the risk factors and symptoms of bladder cancer and take note of any concerning changes to discuss with your doctor. If you have been diagnosed with bladder cancer, the team at Virginia Cancer Specialists will work with you to create a personalized treatment plan and provide ongoing support. For more information, or to schedule an appointment, visit our [website](#) or call 571-350-8400.

About Virginia Cancer Specialists

[Virginia Cancer Specialists \(VCS\)](#) is the largest comprehensive private cancer practice in Northern Virginia, featuring a world-class treatment team committed to fighting cancer and diseases of the blood. VCS provides patients access to leading-edge treatment protocols, clinical trials, and comprehensive care, along with a multidisciplinary approach to medical oncology, radiation oncology, musculoskeletal tumor surgery, breast surgery, and thoracic surgery. They also offer genetic counseling, palliative care, oncology nurse navigators, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, oncology infusion nurses, oncology pharmacists, social workers, dietitians, and laboratory technicians.