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Unexpected weight loss and cancer

A UK study of 4.8 million GP records searched for the term unexpected weight loss (UWL) and then checked for diagnoses of cancer (National UK register) within six months.¹ 63,973 had UWL, and 1.4% of those had a cancer below the 3% threshold for investigating in the UK. However, some subgroups had a risk above this, including male ever smokers aged 50 years or older, and in men and women with other clinical features that could indicate cancer. The abnormal individual blood test results associated with cancer in patients with UWL are low albumin levels and raised levels of white cell count, calcium, platelets, and inflammatory markers in men and women.

Other clinical features associated with cancer in patients with UWL are abdominal mass, abdominal pain, appetite loss, chest signs, iron deficiency, anaemia, jaundice, and lymphadenopathy in both men and women; dysphagia, haemoptysis, and non-cardiac chest pain in men; and back pain, change in bowel habit, dyspepsia, and venous thromboembolism in women.

Reference:

1. Prioritising primary care patients with unexpected weight loss for cancer investigation: diagnostic accuracy study BMJ (2020) [View here](#)

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