Oesophageal Cancer Recognition

NICE NG12 (updated May 2025)

CALL 999: Signs of Major Bleeding

- ☐ Vomiting blood (haematemesis) with pallor, sweating, rapid pulse, dizziness, or collapse
- ☐ Black tarry stools (melaena) with dizziness, weakness, collapse, or suspected GI bleeding
- ☐ Patient appears haemodynamically compromised: do not advise them to wait or self-transport

REFER TODAY: NICE NG12 2-Week Wait Criteria

- ☐ Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) at any age: refer regardless of co-existing reflux symptoms
- ☐ Age 55 or over with unexplained weight loss PLUS any of: upper abdominal pain, persistent reflux, or dyspepsia
- ☐ Haematemesis without haemodynamic compromise: urgent medical assessment via GP or local pathway
- ☐ Unexplained iron deficiency anaemia with upper GI symptoms: urgent GP assessment
- ☐ Advise patient clearly: this is a precautionary referral, not a diagnosis

Symptom Red Flag Comparison

Symptom	Reassuring	Red Flag
Swallowing	Occasional, with dry food	Progressive: solids then liquids
Heartburn	Responds to antacids	Persistent despite treatment
Weight	Stable or intentional loss	Unintentional weight loss
Regurgitation	Occasional, after meals	Frequent, food returning from chest
Voice/cough	Explained by cold	Unexplained hoarseness or cough
Bleeding	None	Haematemesis or black tarry stools

SELF-CARE: Low-Risk Symptoms Only

- ☐ No red flags: situational heartburn, no swallowing difficulty, no weight loss, no bleeding
- ☐ Advise: smaller meals, avoid lying flat after eating, reduce fatty or spicy food, healthy weight
- ☐ Safety-net: return or see GP if symptoms persist beyond 4 weeks, worsen, or change
- ☐ Do not supply further antacids without asking about symptom duration and swallowing

Key reminders: Dysphagia should always trigger referral even when reflux symptoms appear to provide an explanation. Patients buying repeated antacids without improvement are a key safety-netting opportunity. Always ask: "How long?" and "Does food stick when you swallow?" Reference: NICE NG12 (updated May 2025) nice.org.uk/guidance/ng12