



Bowel Cancer

Bowel cancer is a general term for cancer that begins in the large bowel.

Depending on where the cancer starts, bowel cancer is sometimes called colon or rectal cancer.

Bowel cancer is one of the most common types of cancer diagnosed in the UK.

Did you know...

9 in 10
people with
bowel cancer
are over 60

It can affect
both men
and women

There is a
free bowel
cancer
screening
helpline 0800
707 60 60

Bowel cancer
is more
common in
overweight
or obese
people

Signs and symptoms

- Persistent blood in your poo – that happens for no obvious reason or is associated with a change in bowel habit
- A persistent change in your bowel habit – which is usually having to poo more and your poo may also become more runny
- Persistent lower abdominal (tummy) pain, bloating or discomfort – that's always caused by eating and may be associated with loss of appetite or significant unintentional weight loss

Screening

- In England, you receive a bowel cancer screening kit if you're aged between 60 and 74 years.
- Some people may now receive a test before they turn 60. This is because NHS England is gradually expanding this programme to also invite people aged between 50 and 59.
- People aged over 74, can request a screening kit every 2 years by contacting the bowel cancer screening programme on 0800 707 6060.
- For the screening test, you use a home test kit to collect a small sample of poo and send it to a lab. This is checked for tiny amounts of blood.

Risks and how to reduce them

- Age – almost 9 in 10 people with bowel cancer are aged 60 or over
- Diet – a diet high in red or processed meats and low in fibre can increase your risk
- Weight – bowel cancer is more common in overweight or obese people
- Exercise – being inactive increases your risk of getting bowel cancer
- Alcohol – drinking alcohol might increase your risk of getting bowel cancer
- Smoking – smoking may increase your chances of getting bowel cancer
- Family history – having a close relative (mother or father, brother or sister) who developed bowel cancer under the age of 50 puts you at a greater lifetime risk of developing the condition; screening is offered to people in this situation, and you should discuss this with a GP

You can take action to reduce your risk by:

- Taking your bowel screening test when invited
- Make sure your GP practice has your correct address so your kit is posted to the right place
- Seeing your GP if you notice any of the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer
- Eating less red meat
- Getting more active
- Reducing your alcohol intake
- Losing weight if you are overweight
- Eating a balanced diet
- Stopping smoking

Using the home testing kit

- The NHS bowel cancer screening kit used in England is the faecal immunochemical test kit – known as the FIT kit.
- You collect a small sample of poo on a small plastic stick and put it into the sample bottle and post it to a lab for testing.
- There are instructions that come with the kit. You can also find NHS bowel cancer screening kit instructions on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and in this [Cancer Research video](#).

Further information and resources

- [Healthworks 'Take a minute' bowel cancer video](#)
- [NHS website](#)
- [Cancer Research](#) - bowel cancer
- [Bowel Cancer UK](#)