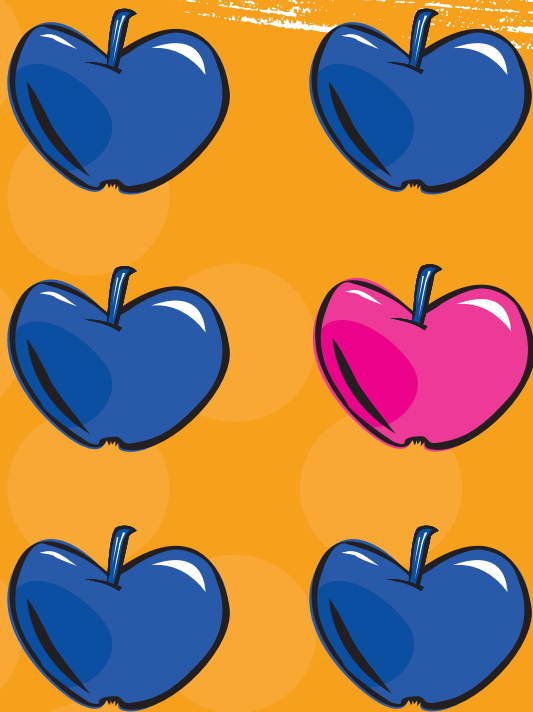


bowel cancer

spot the *symptoms* early



...and reduce your risk

CANCER RESEARCH UK



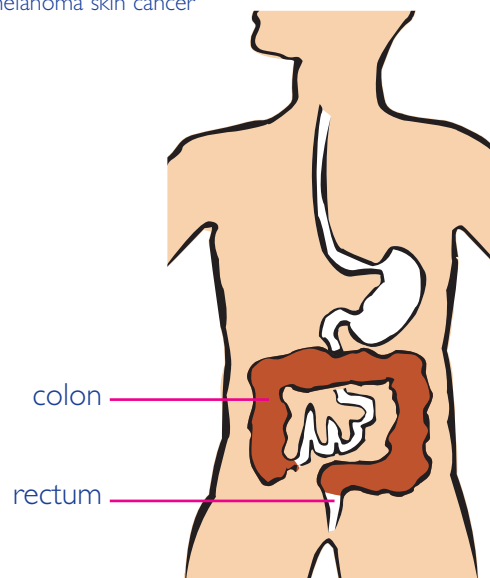
Bowel cancer facts

Bowel cancer is a common cause of illness and death in the UK. If it is detected early there is a very good chance of cure. This leaflet contains information about the causes and symptoms of bowel cancer and suggests how you can take action to reduce your risk.

How common is it?

Bowel cancer is much more common in the Western world than in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. In the UK it is the third most common cancer*, with more than 35,500 new cases diagnosed each year. It can occur at any age but is most common in the elderly. Bowel cancer is rare in people under 40.

*excluding non-melanoma skin cancer



What is bowel cancer?

The medical term for bowel cancer is colorectal cancer. Two out of three bowel cancers occur in the colon and one in three in the rectum. Waste from the food we have eaten and digested passes through the bowel before leaving the body.

What causes it?

Bowel cancer develops when genes are damaged in cells lining the bowel. We do not know precisely why this happens, but a number of things make it more likely to occur. Of these, diet and hereditary factors are the most important.

A diet that is low in vegetables, fruit and fibre, but includes lots of red and processed meat, may increase our risk of developing bowel cancer.

Some people inherit a greater than average risk of this disease. Around 1 in 20 cases occur in someone with a strong family history of bowel cancer, suggesting that they might have inherited a high-risk faulty gene. Other people inherit genes that increase the risk to a lesser extent.

Other conditions that may increase your risk of bowel cancer are the inflammatory bowel diseases, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. If you have had a polyp or cancer in the bowel before, you may have an increased risk of developing another. A polyp is a small growth protruding into the bowel. Some polyps develop into cancer but this is prevented if they are removed.

What are the symptoms of bowel cancer?

Many of the symptoms described here are most often caused by problems much less serious than bowel cancer – so try not to worry if you develop any of them, but do get them checked out. Bowel cancer is one of the most curable cancers when caught early. By being aware of the warning signs, you can make sure you don't overlook them.

Bleeding (from the colon or rectum)

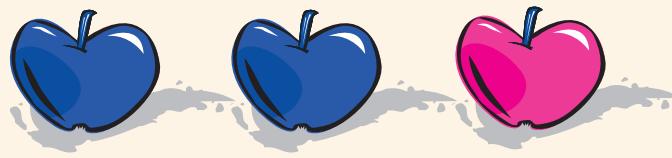
The most common sign is blood in the stool or faeces (often seen as bright or darker red flecks). There are other causes of bleeding apart from cancer: Bleeding accompanied by lumps, swellings, itching or soreness around the back passage may be caused by piles (haemorrhoids). If you notice any persistent bleeding it is best to consult your GP.

Changes in bowel habit

You should also seek advice from a doctor if you have a change in bowel habit that lasts four weeks or more. Symptoms can include going to the toilet more often and having looser, diarrhoea-like motions, perhaps alternating with periods of constipation. Other possible signs are a feeling of not completely emptying your bowels or passing mucus with your stools.

Other symptoms

Other signs to watch out for are unexplained weight loss, pain that comes and goes in waves, tiredness or breathlessness without obvious reason, or a lump or swelling in your abdomen.



Help reduce your risk

Your eating habits are very important when it comes to bowel cancer risk. Exercise may also have an important part to play in reducing your risk.

Following the guidelines below cannot guarantee that you will not get bowel cancer, but will almost certainly reduce your risk...

- eat plenty of vegetables and fruit (both raw and cooked) – at least five portions a day
- eat plenty of foods that are high in fibre and starch, such as wholegrain cereals, pasta, rice, bread, yam and potatoes
- cut down on processed and red meat (beef, lamb, pork) and opt for poultry, fish, beans or lentils
- cut down on fat – choose reduced or low-fat dairy products and select lean cuts of meat
- grill or steam food rather than fry or roast
- take regular exercise – try at least three brisk walks a week or similar (walking to work is one good way of building regular exercise into a busy week)
- avoid becoming overweight (a high calorie intake may increase your risk of bowel cancer)
- keep alcohol consumption within sensible limits – no more than 3 units each day for men and 2 units each day for women (one unit is half a pint of beer, a small glass of wine or 25ml – less than a pub measure – of spirits).

Screening

Studies have shown that screening for bowel cancer saves lives by finding it early. The NHS has been piloting screening in the general population. The results will tell us how effective it would be in practice.

If you are worried about your family history of bowel cancer, ask your GP if you are at sufficient risk to be screened. It's important to realise that bowel cancer is common and cases can cluster in families by chance.

Your risk of the disease increases...

- the more relatives you have on the same side of the family (mother's or father's side) who have had bowel cancer
- the younger your relatives were when they were first diagnosed (especially if under 50)
- the more closely related these relatives are to you.

Early detection saves lives

If bowel cancer is found early, there is a very good chance of cure. But its early symptoms are often overlooked and many patients are diagnosed after the cancer has started to spread.

Symptoms summarised

See your GP if any of the following symptoms persist over a period of two weeks or more.

They are most likely to be caused by less serious problems, but need to be checked out:

- blood in your bowel motions (seen as bright or darker red flecks)
- blood or mucus in the stool combined with a change in bowel habit
- a persistent change in bowel habit
- unexplained weight loss

Reduce your risk

- eat plenty of vegetables and fruit
- eat plenty of foods high in fibre and starch such as wholegrain cereals, pasta, rice, bread, yam and potatoes
- cut down on red and processed meat
- take regular exercise
- maintain a healthy body weight
- moderate your alcohol intake

Family history

If you have a family history of bowel cancer and are concerned about your risk, ask your GP about screening or referral to a family cancer clinic.

Further information

For more about cancer, visit our patient information website... www.cancerhelp.org.uk click on specific cancers then bowel cancer.

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses. Direct line **020 7061 8355** or freephone 0800 (CANCER) 226237 or email cancer.info@cancer.org.uk

About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. If you would like to support our work please call **020 7009 8820** or visit our website.

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Bobby Moore was just 51 when he died from bowel cancer in 1993. Since its launch, the **Bobby Moore Fund** for Cancer Research UK has raised over £2 million for research into the prevention, screening and cure of bowel cancer. For more information about the Bobby Moore Fund please visit www.cancerresearchuk.org/bmf



The Bobby Moore Fund
for Cancer Research UK

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