

The bowel screening programme

In Northern Ireland anyone aged 60 – 74 who is registered with a doctor's surgery will be invited to take part in the bowel screening programme. This test is offered every two years.

The screening programme involves a simple testing kit that is sent out to your home to do yourself and return by post. The test is to identify any blood hidden in your bowel movement. If blood is found in the sample, further testing will be offered. Blood in a sample **does not necessarily mean cancer.**

Make sure you are registered at your doctor's surgery so that when you reach the target age group you will get an invitation to take part in screening. It is really important to take part in the bowel screening programme when it is offered – **early detection means more successful treatment that can save your life.**



If you have any concerns about cancer you can talk to one of our specialist nurses on the Cancer Focus NI free information and support NurseLine

0800 783 3339

Monday to Friday 9am - 1pm
Calls are free from a landline
nurseline@cancerfocusni.org



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Focus on Bowel Cancer

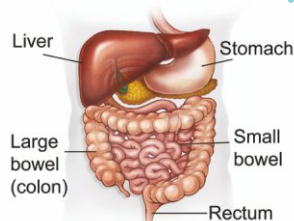
In Northern Ireland around 1,200 men and women are diagnosed with bowel cancer every year, making it the third most common cancer. It is the second most common cause of cancer death with about 420 deaths each year. However, if diagnosed early, bowel cancer is highly treatable.

The Bowel

The bowel is part of the digestive system and is divided into the small bowel (small intestine) and the large bowel (colon and rectum).

As digested food leaves the small bowel it enters the large bowel where water and salts are absorbed.

The muscles of the large bowel move the waste towards the rectum and anus where it leaves the body.



Risk factors for bowel cancer

Age:

Bowel cancer risk increases with age. Around 90% of cases occur in people over the age 50 but it can still develop in younger people.

Family history of bowel cancer:

If one or more close relatives (parent, brother or sister) have been diagnosed with bowel cancer before the age of 45, there is a possibility the condition is hereditary.

Other bowel conditions:

Long-standing inflammatory diseases of the bowel such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis may increase the risk of bowel cancer. Bowel polyps (growths) could potentially become cancerous if left untreated and allowed to grow beyond a certain size.

Diabetes:

There is an increased risk of developing bowel cancer if you have diabetes. However, the reason is not clear. Research is currently being carried out in this area.

Lifestyle factors

Certain lifestyle factors can increase your risk of bowel cancer, such as too much red and processed meat, too much fatty food, too much alcohol, obesity and not enough physical activity.

The symptoms outlined in this leaflet are often caused by something less serious and don't usually mean it's cancer. However, finding cancer early makes it more treatable and a trip to your doctor could save your life. So if in doubt get checked out.

Symptoms of bowel cancer

- Bleeding from the rectum (back passage) and/or blood in your bowel motions lasting 2-3 weeks
- A change in bowel motions lasting 6 weeks or more (e.g. more frequent or looser bowel motions)
- Unexplained tiredness
- Unexplained weight loss
- A pain or lump in your abdomen (stomach)

Reduce your risk

- Eat plenty of fibre such as oats, pulses (peas, beans and lentils), fruit and vegetables, cereals, wholegrain bread, wholemeal pasta and brown rice. Also drink plenty of water.
- Avoid processed meats (bacon, ham, sausages).
- Limit red meat (beef, lamb, pork) consumption to 4-5 portions per week. One portion is the size of a pack of cards.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Be physically active.
- If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention.
- Take up any invitation to take part in bowel screening (see overleaf).
- Don't start smoking, or stop if you do.

For help in stopping smoking visit:
www.want2stop.info