

## 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 found 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.**

**The symptoms outlined in this leaflet are often caused by something less serious and doesn't usually mean it's cancer. However, finding cancer early makes it more treatable and a trip to your doctor could save your life. If in doubt, get it checked out. If it's not serious, your mind will be put at rest. You certainly won't be wasting anyone's time.**

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 Nurse Line.

**0800 783 3339**

Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am - 1pm.  
Calls are **free** and **confidential** from a landline.  
[nurseline@cancerfocusni.org](mailto:nurseline@cancerfocusni.org)



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Charity No: NIC 101307



## 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 450 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. Over 90% of cases occur in people over the age of 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.

### Diet

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.



## 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 of 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
- If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention
- Take up all invitations to take part in bowel screening (see overleaf)
- Don't start smoking, or stop if you do

For stop smoking help go to [www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)