

Bowel Cancer

What you should know



**Irish
Cancer
Society**

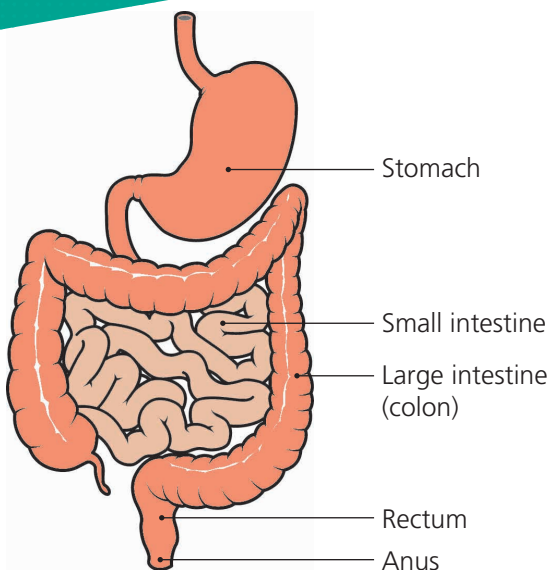
What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is when the normal cells in your bowel grow in an abnormal way to form a mass of cells called a tumour.

Bowel cancer is also known as colorectal cancer or cancer of the colon and rectum.

The bowel is part of your digestive system. It is made up of two parts – the large bowel (intestine) and the small bowel (intestine). Most cancers occur in the large bowel.

Food that we eat passes from the stomach into the small bowel and then into the large bowel. Nutrients from our food are absorbed as it passes through. Waste is held in the rectum until it is passed from the body in a bowel motion.



What increases my risk of bowel cancer?



Age

Bowel cancer is more common in people over 50 years.



Previous cancer

If you have had bowel cancer before.



Family history

Having a member of your immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister or child) or relatives (uncle, aunt) on the same side of the family who have had bowel cancer. Or if an immediate family member was diagnosed with bowel cancer at a young age (under 45).



Inherited bowel conditions

If you or someone in your family has or had an inherited bowel condition such as familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer.



Other bowel conditions

If you have a history of a bowel condition such as polyps, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease or coeliac disease.



Obesity

If you are obese (overweight).



Diet

A diet high in fat and red meat and low in fibre, fruit and vegetables.



Lifestyle

Drinking above the low-risk guidelines and smoking.

Risk factors increase your chance of getting bowel cancer. Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get bowel cancer. Sometimes people with no risk factors may get the disease.



What are the symptoms of bowel cancer?

- A lasting change in your bowel habit – going more often, looser motions or constipation
- Blood in your stools or bleeding from your back passage
- Pain or discomfort in your tummy area or back passage
- Trapped wind or fullness in your tummy
- A lump in your tummy area or rectum
- Feeling you have not emptied your bowel fully after a motion
- Unexplained weight loss
- Feeling tired or breathless due to anaemia (fewer red blood cells).

These symptoms can be caused by other things, but always get them checked out.

What should I do if I have any symptoms?

If you have any symptoms or changes in your body that you are worried about, it's important to have them checked by your GP (family doctor). Tell them if you have a family history of bowel cancer. The chances are it will not be cancer. Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time. The sooner cancer is spotted, the more likely you are to recover from it.

How is bowel cancer diagnosed?

If your doctor thinks your symptoms need to be investigated, you will have more tests. Tests that can help to diagnose bowel cancer include:



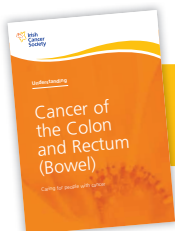
Rectal exam: During a rectal exam, your doctor puts a gloved finger into your back passage to feel for any lumps or swelling.



Stool sample: Your doctor may ask for a sample of your stools (bowel motion) to check for any hidden blood.



Colonoscopy: The doctor passes a flexible tube with a light and camera into your bowel through your back passage. He or she can look for any abnormal areas or swellings, and may also take photos and samples of your bowel.



If you are diagnosed with bowel cancer, our booklet has more information.

How can I reduce my risk of bowel cancer?

-  **Have a healthy diet:** Limit the amount of red meat and processed meat that you eat. Processed meat includes bacon, sausages, ham and salami. Eat more fibre, including at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
-  **Be a healthy weight:** Being a healthy weight is one of the best ways to protect yourself from cancer. Having a healthy diet and taking regular exercise will help.
-  **Be active:** Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days a week.
-  **Limit alcohol:** Drinking alcohol increases your risk of bowel cancer. The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you can reduce your risk of bowel cancer.
-  **Don't smoke:** Smoking increases your risk of bowel cancer, and the more you smoke the greater the risk. Smokers are also more likely to develop polyps in their bowel than non-smokers.
-  **Get screened:** Screening can spot signs of bowel cancer. It is especially important to get screened if you have a family history of bowel cancer or other risk factors.

See the end of this leaflet for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.

Can I be screened for bowel cancer?

Testing for bowel cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening. BowelScreen is the national bowel screening programme. BowelScreen delivers a home test kit to women and men aged 60 to 69 every two years. You send back a sample of your faeces (bowel motion). The sample is tested for traces of blood. If there is blood in your faeces it doesn't mean that you have cancer, but you may be advised to have more tests. For more information see www.bowelscreen.ie

12 ways to reduce your cancer risk



Do not smoke



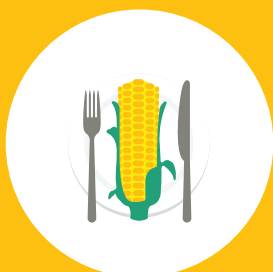
Avoid second-hand smoke



Be a healthy weight



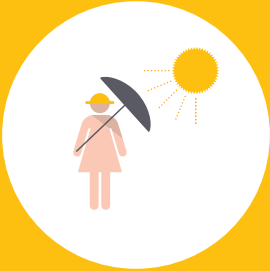
Be physically active in everyday life



Have a healthy diet



Avoid alcohol



Avoid too much sun



Avoid pollutants



**Get screened for
cancer**



**Breastfeed your baby /
Limit HRT**



**Get vaccinations -
Hepatitis B for
babies / HPV for girls**



**Find out if you are
exposed to radon
gas in your area**

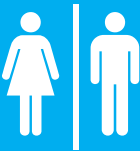
Some facts about bowel cancer



Bowel cancer can usually be treated successfully if it is found early



Most bowel cancer cases are found at a late stage



Bowel cancer affects both men and women



How common is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is one of the most common cancers in Ireland that affects both men and women. Around 2,500 people are diagnosed with it each year.

For more information...

If you are worried or have questions about bowel cancer or any cancer...



Call our Cancer Nurseline

Freephone 1800 200 700



or email cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie

for confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and reducing your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie

Visit our website www.cancer.ie for more information on bowel cancer and ways to reduce your risk of cancer.

Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave **1800 201 203**, Freetext **QUIT** to **50100** or visit www.quit.ie