

Bowel Cancer

What you should know



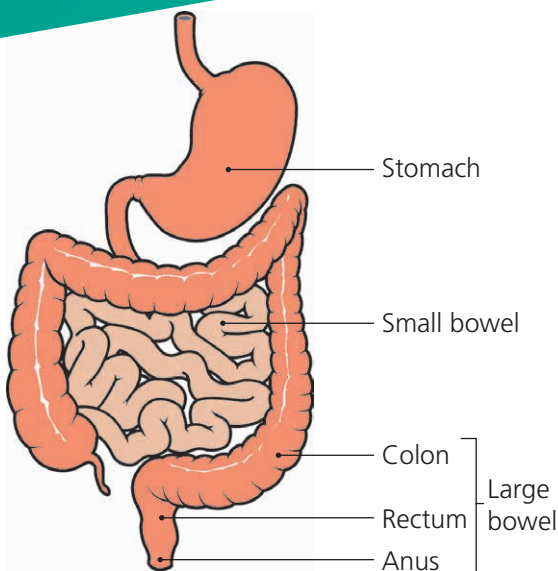
What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is when the normal cells in your bowel (intestines) grow in an abnormal way to form a lump called a tumour.

The bowel is part of your digestive system. The bowel has two parts – the small bowel and the large bowel. Most cancers occur in the large bowel in the colon and rectum.

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.

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



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, you have a higher risk of getting it again.



Family history

Your risk is increased:

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



Inherited bowel conditions

Your risk is higher 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.

What else increases the risk of bowel cancer?



Other bowel conditions

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



Obesity

Being 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:



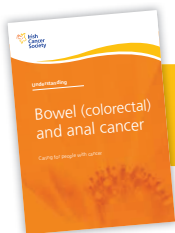
Rectal exam: During a rectal exam, your doctor puts a gloved finger into your back passage to feel for any lumps or swelling.



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 thin tube with a light and camera into your bowel through your back passage. They 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 (small growths) 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 next page for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.

Bowel cancer screening

Testing for bowel cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening. BowelScreen is the national bowel screening programme. BowelScreen delivers a free home test kit to women and men aged 60 to 69 every two years. You send back a sample of your bowel motion. The sample is tested for traces of blood. If there is blood in the sample 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



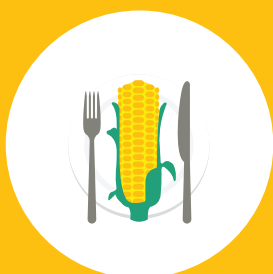
Avoid second-hand smoke



Be a healthy weight



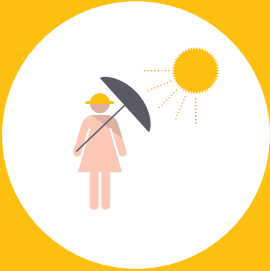
Be physically active in everyday life



Have a healthy diet



Avoid alcohol



Avoid too much sun



Avoid pollutants



Get screened for cancer



**Breastfeed your baby /
Limit HRT (a hormonal
drug for menopausal
symptoms)**



**Get vaccinations -
Hepatitis B for
babies / HPV for
older children**



**Find out if you are
exposed to radon
gas in your area.
See www.epa.ie**

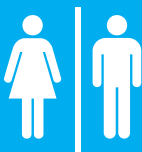
Some facts about bowel cancer



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.

More information...

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



Call our Cancer Nurseline
Freephone 1800 200 700



Email cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie
We will provide you with confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres, where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and how you can reduce 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 you can 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



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