

Bowel Cancer

Signs, symptoms and screening



Key signs and symptoms

01

Bleeding from your bottom or blood in your poo

02

A persistent and unexplained change in bowel habit

03

Noticing unexplained weight loss or tiredness

04

Pain or finding a lump in your tummy

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cancer but it's important to get them checked by a GP.

Bowel cancer screening basics and next steps

What is bowel screening?

Bowel screening is designed to detect bowel cancer at an early stage in people with no symptoms. The test looks for small amounts of blood in your poo, which can be an early sign of bowel cancer.

Who is bowel screening for?

Anyone aged 50 and over (60 and over in Northern Ireland) will be sent a test every 2 years until they are 74.

How will you be invited for screening?

Eligible people are automatically sent a home testing kit to complete and return. If you want to continue bowel screening after age 74, you need to call the NHS bowel screening helpline to order a kit.

What happens during and after bowel screening?

- The test kit includes a sample bottle, an envelope, and instructions
- You simply follow the instructions to collect and package your sample, and post it back
- Results take around two weeks, either by post or in the NHS app
- **There are two possible results:** One, no further tests needed.
Two, further tests needed

If you've been told that no further tests are needed, you'll automatically be sent another test in two years. However, this result is not a guarantee that you do not have bowel cancer. See a GP if you have or get the symptoms of bowel cancer listed below.

If blood was found in your poo it will need to be investigated. If this is your result, you'll be invited to an appointment with a specialist nurse who will talk with you about your results, and what happens next.

When should you contact a GP?

- ✓ If you notice any of the symptoms on page one.
- ✓ If symptoms persist or feel unusual for you.
- ✓ If your bowel screening is overdue.
- ✓ If you feel worried – it's always better to check.

47–48%

Of people aged 55+ are worried about getting bowel cancer.

59–68%

Of men and women aged 55+ think they're eligible for screening.

23–32%

Of those of bowel screening age have delayed because they have no symptoms.

Common myths about bowel screening

Myth “Bowel screening tests for cancer”

Fact Bowel screening tests for small amounts of blood in your poo that might be a sign of cancer but can also be caused by other non-cancerous conditions.

Myth “Screening is embarrassing”

Fact The bowel screening test is completed privately and sent discreetly through the post. It's understandable that some people will feel embarrassed but try not to be—it's important.

Myth “If I feel fine, I don't need screening”

Fact Bowel screening is designed to detect bowel cancer when it is at an early stage in people with no symptoms.

Myth “I'm too young to get bowel cancer”

Fact Although most cases of bowel cancer occur in older adults, rates in younger adults are rising, which is why screening is so important.

Myth “I've done a bowel screening test once. I don't need to do it again.”

Fact Bowel cancer can develop at any time, so it's important to complete the test every time you are sent one.

Myth “I live a healthy life so I can't get bowel cancer”

Fact A healthy lifestyle can reduce risk, but bowel cancer can still occur.