

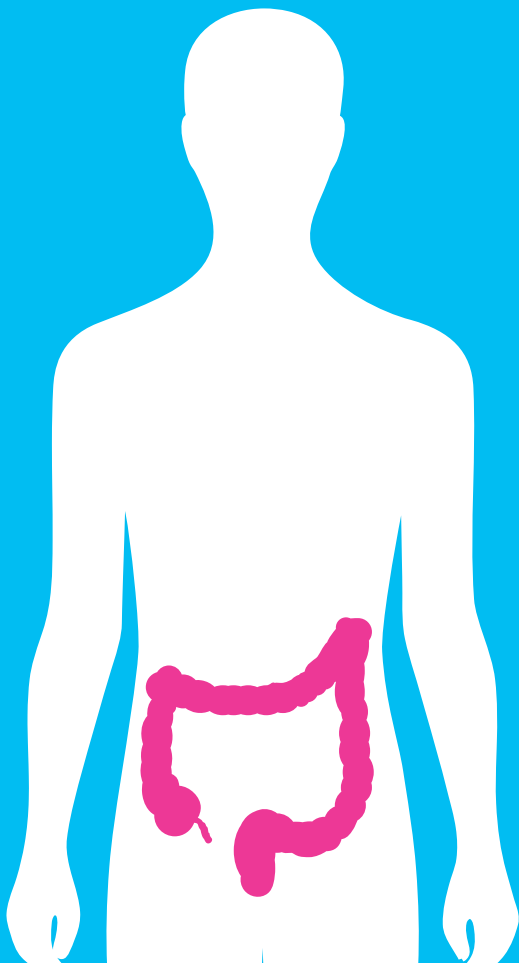
# BOWEL CANCER

How to spot the signs and symptoms  
and reduce your risk

[cruk.org](http://cruk.org)



CANCER  
RESEARCH  
UK



**Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the UK, after breast, lung and prostate cancers.**

**It affects both men and women and the risk increases with age. When bowel cancer is diagnosed at the earliest stage, more than 9 in 10 people will survive the disease for more than 5 years.**

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**In this leaflet you can find out:**

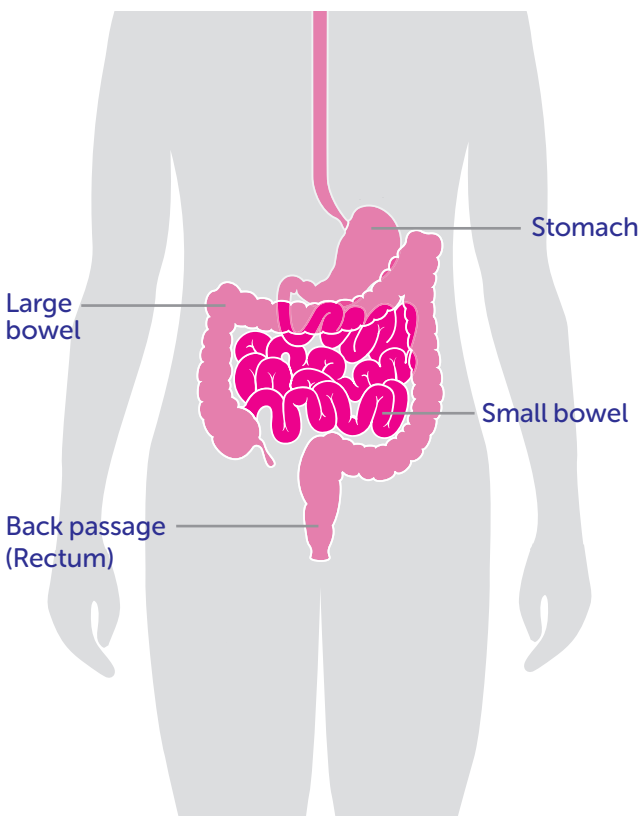
- how to reduce the risk of bowel cancer
- the signs and symptoms to look out for
- bowel cancer screening.

## The bowel

The bowel is made up of two parts, the small and the large bowel. The large bowel is a tube at the end of the digestive system in the tummy made up of the colon and rectum. It absorbs water from the food you eat and passes waste out of the body as poo.

Bowel cancer (sometimes called large bowel or colorectal cancer) means cancer of the colon or rectum. It doesn't include cancers of the small bowel.

## Where is the bowel?



## Who is most at risk?

Like most cancers, the risk of bowel cancer increases with age and most cases are in people over 50

Having a family history of bowel cancer, or having certain bowel conditions, are linked to a higher risk of the disease, talk to your doctor if you are worried.

## What should I look out for?

It is important to know what is normal for you so that you can spot any changes.

## The signs and symptoms of bowel cancer can include:

- bleeding from the bottom without any obvious reason or blood in your poo (this can be red, or it can be black and can make your poo look dark, like tar)
- change in your normal bowel habit such as looser poo, pooing more often and/or constipation
- tummy pain (especially if severe) or a lump in your tummy
- unexplained weight loss.

These symptoms are unlikely to be caused by cancer but it is better to play it safe, so it's important to tell your GP if you notice them.

## How can you reduce your risk?

Around half the cases of bowel cancer diagnosed in the UK each year could be prevented by lifestyle changes.

### To reduce the risk of bowel cancer:



keep a healthy weight



be a non-smoker. If you smoke, it is never too late to stop. The earlier you quit, the better

### Do more of:



boost the amount of fibre in your diet. Try to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day and choose wholegrain bread, cereals, rice and pasta



try to do at least 2.5 hours of physical activity a week. Things like going for a brisk walk or gardening count towards your total, even just doing 10 minutes at a time. The more active you are, the more you cut the risk of bowel cancer

### Do less of:



eat smaller and fewer portions of red and processed meat



cut down on alcohol. If you drink, try to stick within the government guidelines – no more than 1 standard drink a day (2-3 units) a day for women or 2 standard drinks a day (3-4 units) for men. But the less you drink, the lower the risk.

## **Bowel cancer screening**

Bowel screening is used to check for early signs of bowel cancer by looking for hidden traces of blood in your poo. There is a national bowel screening programme for older men and women. They will receive a screening kit to use at home. Samples are sent away for testing.

**In Scotland** people aged

# 50-74

are offered screening every 2 years.

**In England, Wales and Northern Ireland** people aged

# 60-74

are offered screening every 2 years.

If you are older than 74 and live in England or Scotland you won't be sent a screening kit, but you can still take part in bowel cancer screening. To request a free kit:

In **England** call freephone **0800 707 6060**

In **Scotland** call freephone **0800 0121 833**

When bowel cancer is caught early there is a better chance of surviving the disease.

For more information about the bowel screening programme visit

[www.cruk.org/bowelscreening](http://www.cruk.org/bowelscreening)

My cancer was caught in the very early stages and thanks to excellent treatment my experience has been a very positive one



**Clive Barley**  
**Bowel cancer survivor**

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Clive went to his GP after he noticed some blood in his poo.

### **The Bobby Moore Fund**

The Bobby Moore Fund was set up in 1993 by Stephanie Moore MBE in partnership with Cancer Research UK to fund bowel cancer research and raise awareness of the symptoms of the disease.

For more information, please visit [www.bobbymoorefund.org](http://www.bobbymoorefund.org)



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## Further information

You can find out more about cancer at [www.cruk.org/about-cancer](http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer)

For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit [www.spotcancerearly.com](http://www.spotcancerearly.com)

Find out more about our health messages at [www.cruk.org/health](http://www.cruk.org/health)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at [www.cruk.org/leaflets](http://www.cruk.org/leaflets)

## About Cancer Research UK

We pioneer life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we're all here to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers.

Together we will beat cancer sooner. If you want to join the fight, call **0300 123 1861** or visit our website [www.cruk.org](http://www.cruk.org)