

Health & Wellbeing Alert 23-131 Bowel Cancer Awareness

What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is cancer that's found anywhere in the large bowel, which includes the colon and rectum.

The large bowel is part of your digestive system that helps absorb water from your food and removes food waste from your body. How serious bowel cancer is depends on how big the cancer is, if the cancer has spread, and your general health. Bowel cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in the UK, however screening can detect it early, which may mean it's easier to treat.

Everyone aged 60 to 74 years who is registered with a GP and lives in England (50 to 74 years in Scotland & 51 to 74 in Wales) is automatically sent an NHS bowel cancer screening kit every 2 years.

The programme in England is expanding so that everyone aged 50 to 59 years will be eligible for screening in the future.

Private testing:

If you don't meet the NHS criteria for screening but wish to have some peace of mind, our Health Screening provider Bluecreast provide an Early Cancer Add-on, which tests for Stomach, Bowel and Cervical Cancers. This is available for all employees at a very reasonable cost via the [My Benefits portal](#), and payments are split monthly over your annual salary. Spotting the signs of cancers early can be vitally important. In many instances, beginning treatment for cancer early can make all the difference.

Symptoms of bowel cancer may include:

- Changes in your poo, such as having softer poo, diarrhoea or constipation that is not usual for you.
- Needing to poo more or less often than usual for you.
- Blood in your poo, which may look red or black similar to coffee grounds.
- Bleeding from your bottom.
- Often feeling like you need to poo, even if you've just been to the toilet.
- Tummy pain.
- Bloating.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Feeling very tired for no reason.
- It should be noted that in some cases no symptoms can be present.

See a GP if:

- You have any symptoms of bowel cancer for 3 weeks or more.
- Try not to be embarrassed. The doctor or nurse will be used to talking about these symptoms.

Ask for an urgent GP appointment or call NHS 111 if:

- Your poo is black or dark red.

- You have bloody diarrhoea.

Immediate action required go to A&E or call 999 if:

- You're bleeding non-stop from your bottom.
- There's a lot of blood, for example, the toilet water turns red, or you see large blood clots.
- Find your nearest A&E.

Important

Some of these symptoms are very common and can be caused by other conditions. Having the symptoms does not definitely mean you have bowel cancer, but it's important to get checked by a GP. If your symptoms are caused by cancer, finding it early may mean it's easier to treat.

Causes of bowel cancer

You may be at more risk of bowel cancer if:

- You're over 50.
- You smoke.
- You're overweight.
- A close relative has had bowel cancer.
- You have inflammatory bowel disease, which includes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.
- You have small growths in your bowel called bowel polyps.
- You have Lynch Syndrome or familial adenomatous polyposis.

Don't put your life at risk through embarrassment if you have any concerns contact your local GP or AXA Doctor at Hand via [My Benefits portal](#).

Nothing is so important that we cannot take the time to do it look after ourselves!

