

The bowel screening test

Your questions answered



**All men and women
aged 50–74 in
Scotland are invited
to take part in
bowel screening
every two years.**

What this leaflet is about

Everyone in Scotland between 50 and 74 will automatically be sent a bowel cancer home screening test every two years.

Making a decision to do the bowel screening test is a personal choice. So this leaflet answers any questions you might have, to help you decide.

You may also find it helpful to call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833) where trained staff are available to answer any questions you may have. You can also visit **www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/bowel**



Bowel cancer is Scotland's third most common cancer, with almost 4,000 people diagnosed every year.

Bowel screening is the most effective way to find bowel cancer early, when it is most treatable.

Who is the bowel screening test for?

If you're between 50 and 74

Because there's a bigger risk of bowel cancer developing once you reach 50, we'll automatically send you a testing kit every two years until you're 74. So you won't need to ask for one, right up to your 75th birthday

If you're 75 or over

From April 2013, if you're 75 or over you can still take a bowel screening test every two years if you want to. We won't automatically send you a test kit every two years though, so you'll need to ask us for one. It's still free – just call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833).



Bowel cancer is very common. Whatever your age, don't ignore symptoms (see page 8) – make an appointment to see your doctor.

Why do people take the test?

There are many important reasons for taking the bowel screening test:

- Bowel cancer is Scotland's third most common cancer, with almost 4,000 people diagnosed every year.
- Bowel cancer is more common in people over 50, especially men.
- If we find bowel cancer early enough, there's more than a 90% chance of successful treatment. The sooner it's caught, the easier it is to treat.
- Testing aims to find bowel cancer at an early stage – even if you've had no symptoms/feel fine.
- The test can find other changes in your bowel, such as non-cancerous growths called 'polyps'. Most of these can be removed easily, and this can prevent cancer from developing.
- Home testing prevents 150 deaths from bowel cancer every year.



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Are there any disadvantages with the test?

The test picks up the majority of cancers, but isn't 100% accurate. That's because the test looks for blood, but not all polyps and cancers bleed all the time. Research is now testing to find ways to make the screening test even more accurate.



Changes in your bowel can happen between one screening test and the next, so it's important for you to repeat the screening test every two years. Talk to your doctor if you notice any of the symptoms on page 8.

How do I take the test?

We'll send you a kit to test yourself at home. It's a clean, simple way for you to put small samples of your bowel motion (poo) on a special card, which is free of charge and safe to post to the Bowel Screening Centre laboratory for testing. The test looks for hidden blood in your bowel motion (poo), as this could mean a higher chance of bowel cancer.

This might all sound a bit embarrassing. Don't worry – it's not difficult to do. It just takes three visits to the toilet, then you send back your completed kit.

What if I have a question about the test?

We'll give you full instructions with the test. You can also watch a short film about how to do the test at

www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/bowel

But if you have a question, just call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833). The advisers will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy.



There's no need to be embarrassed. You can do the test yourself in the privacy of your own home.

What happens if my result is negative?

Once you've sent your test to the Bowel Screening Centre, they'll post your result to you in two weeks. Most people have a negative result. That means no blood was found in your bowel motion (poo). You won't need to do anything else until we send you another test kit in two years.

It's still worth keeping yourself healthy to reduce your risk from cancer though. There are some tips on how to do this on page 10.

If your result shows small traces of blood

If we find small traces of blood in your sample, we will send you a different test kit with instructions. This is quite common and doesn't always mean there's a problem, but it is important that you do a second test.

What if my result is positive?

If your result comes back positive, it means that blood has been found in your bowel motion (poo). This doesn't mean you have cancer, but it does mean you should get more checks. The Bowel Screening Centre will write to you and tell you what happens next.

The usual way of finding where the blood is coming from is called a colonoscopy. It's an outpatient appointment, so you shouldn't need to stay in hospital for more than a few hours. A thin, flexible tube with a camera will be used to examine your bowel. It takes about half an hour and is a very safe investigation. However, the risks will be explained to you in detail if you need this test.

If you want to know more about colonoscopy, call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833) or go to **www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/bowel**

How many people get a positive result?

- About 10 in every 500 people taking the test will have a positive result, meaning blood was found in their bowel motion (poo).
- When those 10 people have the recommended follow-up tests, it's likely that only one of them will have cancer.
- Of the other nine people, four will have polyps (non-cancerous growths).
- The other five will be clear. This is because their screening test showed blood, but their follow-up checks showed no cancer or polyps.
- The test can't be 100% accurate, as not all polyps and cancers bleed. So it's very important to keep testing yourself every two years and to never ignore symptoms (listed on page 8).

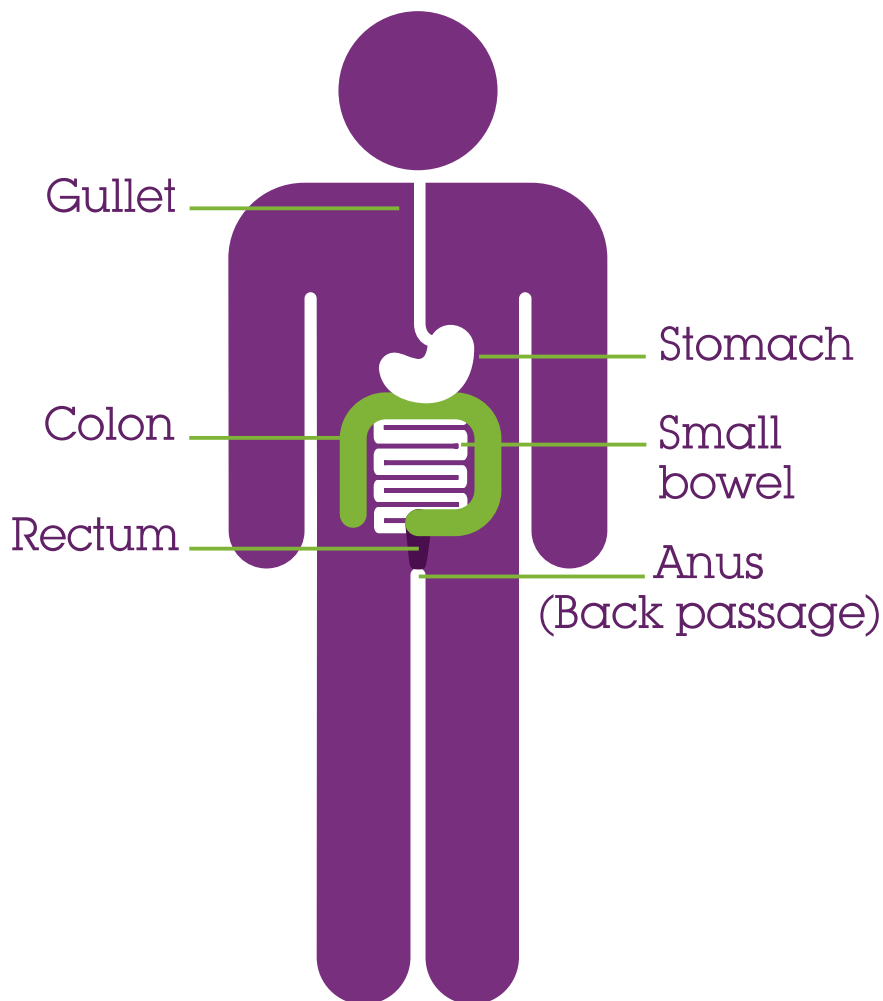
What are the symptoms I should look for?

These symptoms can be caused by a number of conditions, not just cancer. But if you've noticed any of these yourself, make an appointment to tell your doctor:

- Repeated bleeding from your bottom or blood in your bowel motion (poo).
- A recent change in your bowel motion (poo) that continues every day for over six weeks, without going back to normal.
- Watery poo on its own or with constipation (constipation on its own is less likely to be serious).
- Severe pain in your stomach that won't go away, especially after eating.
- You've recently lost weight without trying.
- People say you look pale and you feel tired a lot.

But often there are no symptoms

Usually early cancer doesn't even cause symptoms, but testing yourself could still detect it if it's there. Cancer is easier to treat at an early stage too. So better to be on the safe side and test yourself every two years, even if you feel well.



Can I reduce my risk of bowel cancer?

Yes, there are things you can do to lower your risk of bowel cancer:

- Take a home test every two years. If you're 50–74, we'll send you a letter and test kit when it's time.
- Eat high-fibre foods like wholemeal bread, cereal or beans.
- Don't eat red and processed meat more than three or four times a week. Red meat includes steak, mince, chops and sausages and processed meats that have flavours added, like ham, bacon, hot dogs or salami.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Walk for about 30 minutes every day.
- Keep to a healthy weight.
- Limit your alcohol to less than three units a day for men and less than two units a day for women. And have two alcohol-free days every week. To see what a unit is, visit **www.drinksmarter.org**
- If you smoke, there is lots of support available to help you stop. Call Smokeline on **0800 84 84 84** or visit **www.canstopsmoking.com** to find out more.

- Don't be embarrassed to tell your doctor if you have any worries about your bowel habits. You'll feel better after talking about it.

For more information about staying healthy, visit **www.takelifeon.co.uk**

How we use your medical information

Make sure your doctor has your current address on record, so we can send you regular screening tests.

The Scottish Bowel Screening Programme records your personal details and results of tests to monitor and improve the programme.

Only screening staff and those involved in your care will see your information. You have the right to object to the use of your information for these purposes and the NHS is obliged to agree, if it's possible to do so. However, this would reduce our ability to monitor the effectiveness of the service and improve things. You have the right to see information that the screening centre holds about you and you can get a copy.

Screening information may be used for research, public health, education and training purposes. Any test samples and information used in this way will have your personal details removed.

If you need more advice about use of personal information or how to access information held about you, please contact the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833). Trained staff are available to answer your questions. There's also a voicemail service if nobody is available to take your call. Leave a message and a member of staff will call you back. We'll treat your call in strict confidence.



The advisers at the Bowel Screening Centre will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy. Contact the Helpline on 0800 0121 833 (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833).

This publication is available online
at **www.healthscotland.com**
or telephone **0131 536 5500**.

Traditional Chinese

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Polish

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Urdu

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and Polish, and in an Easy Read format.

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Bowel Screening:

Scottish Bowel Screening Programme

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