

Bowel cancer: how to reduce your risk.



13 11 20
Cancer Council

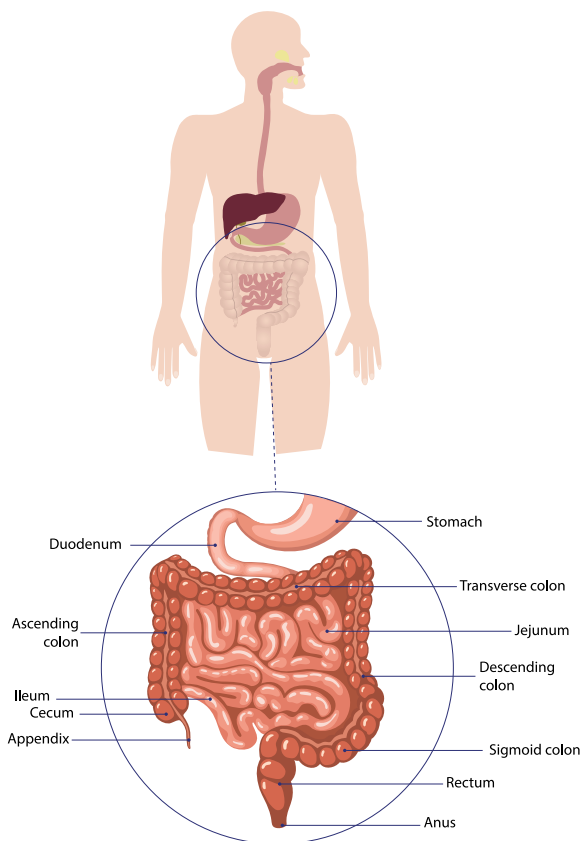
 **Cancer
Council**
WA

What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is the second biggest cancer killer in Australia, affecting both men and women.

Bowel cancer is cancer in any part of the large bowel (colon or rectum). It is sometimes known as colorectal cancer and might also be called colon cancer or rectal cancer, depending on where it starts.

Bowel cancer usually develops from the growth of abnormal cells called polyps. Polyps are common and in most cases are non-cancerous, however, some can develop into bowel cancer. If polyps are removed, the risk of bowel cancer is greatly reduced.



Reduce your risk

Your risk of bowel cancer increases with age and is highest for people over 45 years. It is important to remember though that bowel cancer can occur at any age.

Other risk factors include:

- **Lifestyle factors:** a diet high in red or processed meat, a diet low in fibre, not being a healthy weight, not being active, drinking alcohol, or smoking
- **Previous history** of bowel cancer or polyps.
- **Some bowel diseases**, including ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- **Inherited gene disorders**, including Lynch syndrome and Familial Adenomatous Polyposis.

If you're concerned about your risk, see your doctor or healthcare professional.

Around 50%
of bowel cancers could be
prevented
through making lifestyle changes



Finding bowel cancer early

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program invites eligible Australians aged 45 to 74 to screen for bowel cancer using a free home test kit. The home test kit can help find bowel cancer before you have any symptoms, and is simple, quick, and convenient.



It's easy to order a free kit with your Medicare card.

If you are aged 45 to 49 and would like to order your first kit, or if you are aged 50 to 74 and you:

- have thrown out or misplaced your kit,
- have never received your kit, or
- have changed mailing address,

scan the QR code or contact the National Cancer Screening Register on 1800 627 701 or visit ncsr.gov.au/boweltest.



Symptom awareness and early diagnosis

Bowel cancer often occurs without symptoms, especially in the early stages. It is important to see your doctor or healthcare professional if you notice any of the following:

- blood in your poo (even just once)

For three weeks or more:

- a change in bowel habits (e.g. diarrhoea, constipation)
- abdominal pain or bloating
- rectal pain
- unexplained weight loss
- unexplained tiredness, weakness, or breathlessness

In most cases, the above changes will not be due to bowel cancer, but it is important that you discuss them with your doctor or healthcare professional.

90% of bowel cancers found early can be successfully treated.

Further information

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

1800 627 701

cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel

Cancer Council Western Australia

08 9212 4333

cancerwa.asn.au/bowel-screening/

Cancer Council

bowelcancer.org.au

What can you do to reduce your risk of bowel cancer



Participate in the free National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

- From age 45 to 74



Make smoking history

- Stop smoking and vaping.



Eat for health

- Including limiting red and processed meats and eating plenty of fibre.



Be active

- Maintain a healthy weight.



Avoid alcohol

- Have alcohol-free days and swap to low or no-alcohol drinks.



Be aware of any symptoms

- If you notice any unusual changes, see your doctor or health professional.



Discuss any family history

- Bowel cancer, bowel diseases, or genetic disorders with your doctor or healthcare professional.



For support and information on cancer and cancer-related issues, speak to a cancer nurse on **13 11 20**. Calls are confidential and available statewide Monday to Friday during business hours. Local call costs apply, except for mobiles.