



## Bowel cancer – stacking the odds in your favour

April is **Bowel Cancer Awareness Month** – a time to find out more about how you can avoid the UK's fourth most common cancer as well as raise money for critical research work and awareness campaigns.

Bowel cancer - also known as colorectal cancer - can occur anywhere in the colon (large bowel) or rectum and accounts for around 11% of new cancer cases each year with over a hundred people being diagnosed every day.

You can find out more about bowel cancer symptoms [here](#).

You can find out more about bowel cancer screening [here](#).

### Bowel cancer red flags

Here are the three key signs of potential bowel cancer to look out for. They don't mean that you have bowel cancer of course – but if you do experience any of these for a period of three weeks or more then you should check in with your doctor who will be able to assess you further.

**Persistent blood in your poo** – that happens for no obvious reason or is associated with a change in bowel habit.

**A persistent change in your bowel habit** – which is usually having to poo more, and your poo may also become more runny.

**Persistent lower tummy pain, bloating or discomfort** – that's always caused by eating and may be associated with loss of appetite or significant **unintentional weight loss**.

### Bowel cancer screening

If you're aged 60 to 74, the NHS will invite you to take a free home test every two years to detect any blood in your poo, which isn't visible to the naked eye. If you're aged 75 or more, you can still request a test by calling 0800 707 60 60 (no call charge).

### Lifestyle factors

There are plenty of lifestyle choices you can make to keep your bowel cancer risk as low as possible - as well as boost your health and wellbeing in so many other ways.

The most powerful of these include...

- keeping physically active
- maintaining a healthy weight
- avoiding smoking
- minimising your intake of red and processed meats
- eating plenty of dietary fibre
- keeping your alcohol intake as low as possible.

Some colorectal cancer risks factors are not in your control, including...

- increasing age
- having a family history of colorectal cancer
- having a personal history of polyps, inflammatory bowel disease (such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) and possibly untreated H.pylori infection.

If any of these apply to you then you should ensure that you are particularly careful about staying vigilant for the **red flags**, taking part in regular **screening** and positively managing your **lifestyle**.