



# Bowel Cancer

## Bowel Cancer Awareness Month – April

April is Bowel Cancer Awareness month and various initiatives are around to raise awareness of, and raise funds for, bowel cancer.

If you are interested in publicising Bowel Cancer within your school or department, awareness and fundraising materials such as leaflets and posters are available free of charge from Bowel Cancer UK. To find out more or download materials please see the Bowel Cancer UK website.

<https://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/about-bowel-cancer/order-publication/>

## Introduction

Over 38,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year making it the third most common cancer in the UK after lung and breast cancer.

Some facts about the incidence of Bowel Cancer:+

- Approximately one in twenty people in the UK will develop bowel cancer during their lifetime.
- Risk of developing bowel cancer increases with age. Approximately 95% of cases occur in people over the age of 50.
- People with a family history of bowel cancer have an increased risk of developing the disease.
- In 2007, there were 17,600 cases diagnosed in women making it the second most common cancer affecting women after breast cancer.
- Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in men after prostate and lung cancer, with around 21,000 new cases diagnosed in 2007.
- In 2008, there were 1.23 million of new cases of bowel cancer diagnosed worldwide.
- The highest rates of bowel cancer are seen in Europe, North America and Australasia. The lowest incidence rates are in South Central Asia, and Middle African countries.

Statistics show that five year-survival rates for bowel cancer have doubled between the early 1970s and mid 2000s. Approximately 90% of people with bowel cancer will survive the disease for more than 5 years if diagnosed at the earliest stage.

## Screening

The NHS Bowel Screening Programme was introduced in England in 2006 (for men and women aged 60 to 69) and in Scotland in 2007 (for men and women aged 50 to 74). It plays a vital role in the battle against bowel cancer as it can detect bowel cancer at an early stage when treatment is more likely to be effective. Research has shown that regular screening reduces the chance of dying from bowel cancer by about 16%, saving 20,000 lives over the next 20 years, if 60% of eligible people take up their invitation for bowel screening.

## Symptoms

The most common symptoms of bowel cancer include:

- Bleeding from the back passage (rectum) and/or blood in your stools
- A persistent change in normal bowel habits such as diarrhoea, looser stools or constipation lasting for 4 weeks or more.
- Lumps and or pains in your abdomen
- Unexplained weight loss

These symptoms do not necessarily indicate bowel cancer as they could be caused by other diseases such as piles (haemorrhoids) or inflammatory bowel disease. If you are concerned about any symptoms that you think could be caused by bowel cancer you should consult your GP immediately.

## Reduce Your Risk of Bowel Cancer

Poor diet and an inactive lifestyle are key factors which may increase your chances of developing bowel cancer. A few simple lifestyle changes can help you to reduce the risk of developing bowel cancer.

- Know your bowel pattern, so that you can recognise any changes
- Eat a high-fibre diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Limit red meat and avoid processed meat as much as possible
- Keep active and maintain a healthy body weight
- Cut down on alcohol
- Stop smoking

## Sources of Guidance and Advice

This information is sourced from Bowel Cancer UK and Cancer Help UK. For further information about bowel cancer, bowel health and fundraising activities please see the links below.

## **Bowel Cancer UK**

Bowel Cancer Advisory Service is free and confidential and provides specialist information on all aspects of bowel cancer and bowel health issues. The telephone and email service is staffed by specialist colorectal, stoma care and oncology nurses and lines are open Monday to Friday, between 10am and 4pm.

Website: [www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/](http://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/)

Telephone: 0800 8 40 35 40 (freephone)

Email: [advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk](mailto:advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk)

## **Cancer Help UK**

Cancer Help UK is one of 5 websites run by Cancer Research UK and provides a free information service and cancer care for people with cancer and their families. The Cancer Help UK Helpline is staffed by Specialist Nurses and lines are open from Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm.

Website: [www.cancerhelp.org.uk/type/bowel-cancer/](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk/type/bowel-cancer/)

Telephone: 0808 800 4040 (freephone)