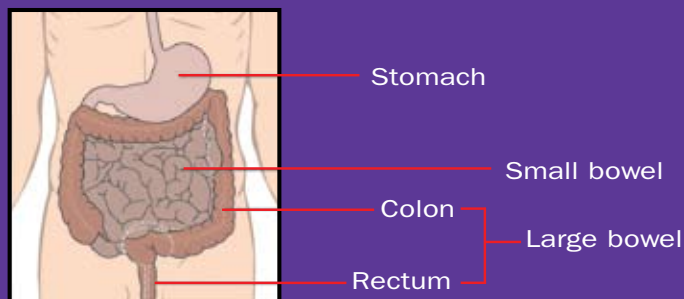


**Cancer is a term used to describe a group of more than 200 diseases that affect different areas of the body. Research has shown that many types of cancer are linked to our diet and lifestyle, which means there are steps we can take to help prevent them. This leaflet is about reducing your risk of bowel cancer.**

### What is the bowel?

The bowel is part of our digestive system and it is divided into two parts: the small bowel and the large bowel. Nearly all bowel cancers are found in the large bowel, which is made up of the colon and the rectum.

The colon absorbs water and some nutrients from food as it passes through the system, leaving behind waste products. These waste products then move through the colon and the rectum before leaving the body.



Bowel cancer is caused by damaged cells, which can grow uncontrollably to form a tumour. Many different factors contribute to the development of bowel cancer – two of the most important are the diet and lifestyle choices we make every day.

### Who is most at risk?

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is one of the most preventable forms of the disease – but it is also the third most common cancer in the UK.

As with all cancers, the risk of developing bowel cancer depends on a number of factors and varies from person to person. Many of the factors that increase our chances of developing the disease are linked to our way of life. This means there are changes we can make to reduce our risk.

#### Lifestyle risk factors

- Diets high in red meat and processed meat
- Lack of physical activity
- Being overweight or obese
- Diets low in fibre
- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking cigarettes

Like most cancers, bowel cancer mainly affects older people, so if you are 50 years or over, you are more likely to develop the disease. Other risk factors include:

- Having a family history of bowel cancer
- Having a personal history of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease

If any of these risk factors apply to you, it does not mean that you will develop bowel cancer – it just means that your risk may be higher than average. The important thing to remember is that bowel cancer is largely preventable.



### Reducing your risk

In 2007, we published an Expert Report on preventing cancer. This reviewed the findings of over 7,000 scientific studies on food, nutrition, physical activity and body weight in relation to cancer prevention.

The Report looked at many different cancer sites, and found that there are steps we can all take to reduce our risk of bowel cancer. Making healthy lifestyle choices, like being physically active and choosing a healthy diet, can have a big effect on our chances of developing the disease. These are the key things we can do to reduce our risk:



#### Maintain a healthy weight

Research shows that being overweight or obese, and particularly carrying extra weight around your waist, increases the risk of bowel cancer. Choosing a healthy, balanced diet and being physically active can help you manage your weight.



#### Choose a healthy diet

◆ There is strong scientific evidence of a link between red meat and bowel cancer. That's why we recommend eating less red meat – aim for less than 500g (cooked weight) of red meat (beef, pork and lamb) a week. The research linking processed meat (like bacon, ham and salami) with bowel cancer is even stronger, so we recommend avoiding these meats as much as possible.



◆ Try to include more **wholegrains** (like wholegrain bread and pasta), **pulses** (like beans and lentils), and **vegetables and fruits** in your diet to keep your digestive system healthy. Scientific studies have found that the fibre and other nutrients in these plant foods can lower our bowel cancer risk.



◆ Try to limit your intake of alcohol. WCRF UK recommends that, if consumed at all, alcoholic drinks are limited to 2 for men and 1 for women a day.



#### Be physically active

Being physically active uses up extra calories and helps you avoid gaining weight. It also helps food to move through your digestive system more quickly. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity every day.

### Symptoms to look out for

If you have any of these symptoms for more than four weeks, visit your doctor. In many cases, they are caused by something less serious, but it's important to have a check up.

- Persistent changes in bowel habits, including diarrhoea or constipation
- A feeling that the bowel hasn't emptied completely after going to the toilet
- Bleeding from the bottom or blood in the stools (either bright red or very dark in colour)
- Cramping or steady pain in the abdomen

### What about screening?

The majority of bowel cancer cases can be successfully treated if they are found early – that's why a bowel cancer screening programme is being put into place across the UK. In England, men and women aged between 60 and 69 should receive their first invitation by the end of 2009. The programme will also be running in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Those over 70 will be able to take part by calling a freephone helpline when the programme starts running in their area.

People taking part in the programme are sent a bowel cancer screening kit so that they can do the test at home. It is then sent to a laboratory where the sample is analysed for any traces of blood, which can be an early sign of bowel cancer.

If you are at a higher risk of bowel cancer (for example, if you have a strong family history of the disease) your GP may recommend bowel cancer screening at an earlier age. You can also pay for screening privately, even if you're not at an increased risk – it's best to speak to your GP for more advice if you are concerned about this.



## Finding out more

WCRF UK also provides information on reducing the risk of other cancers – as well as practical advice on choosing a balanced diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.

**Research shows that about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by making healthy choices in these three areas.**

Visit [www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org) or call us on 020 7343 4205 to find out more.

If you want more information on the detection and treatment of bowel cancer (or other cancers), we recommend contacting Macmillan Cancer Support. Visit their website, [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk), or call 0808 808 2020.



## Getting involved!

There are many ways you can support the work of WCRF UK. Visit [www.wcrf-uk.org/fundraising](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/fundraising) or call our fundraising team on 020 7343 4200 to find out more.

## About WCRF UK

WCRF UK is the principal UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer through the promotion of healthy diet and nutrition, physical activity and weight management. WCRF UK is committed to providing cancer research and education programmes which expand our understanding of the importance of our food and lifestyle choices in the cancer process.

By spreading the good news that cancer can be prevented, WCRF UK hopes that many thousands of lives will be saved. The education and research programmes of WCRF UK are funded almost entirely by donations from the public.

This leaflet gives information based on WCRF UK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention developed from the Expert Report: *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* (2007). The Report, produced by WCRF/AICR, is the largest study of its kind ever published and its Recommendations are based on the most comprehensive review of all the available evidence. WCRF UK is committed to interpreting scientific research in the field of food, nutrition, physical activity and cancer prevention and to translating the results into meaningful and practical advice for the public to follow.

Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit our website:

[www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org)



### WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

### Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)

22 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HH Tel: 020 7343 4200 Fax: 020 7343 4201

Web: [www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org) Email: [wcrf@wcrf.org](mailto:wcrf@wcrf.org)

Registered in London, England No: 2536180

Registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales  
(Registered Charity No: 1000739)

Registered Office: 22 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HH

**“Stopping cancer before it starts”**

© 2009 World Cancer Research Fund / WET6RB

# REDUCING YOUR RISK OF BOWEL CANCER

