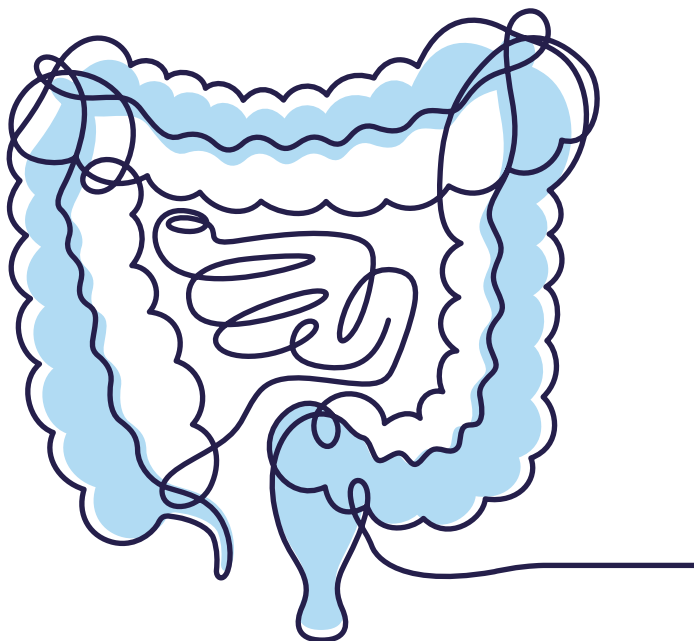


PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST BOWEL CANCER



Understanding bowel cancer

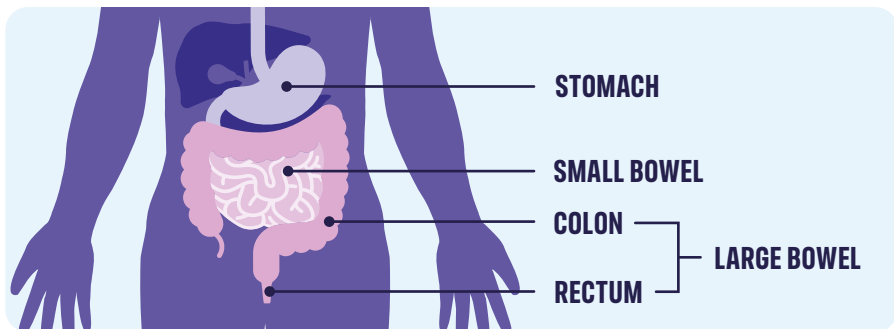
Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the fourth most common type of cancer in the UK. In 2019, there were over 44,700 new bowel cancer cases diagnosed in the UK.

Scientific evidence shows that around **half of bowel cancer cases could be prevented** by **making changes to your diet, being more physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.**



What is the bowel?

The bowel is part of your digestive system and is made up of two parts, your small and large bowel. Most of the nutrients from what you eat and drink are absorbed in your small bowel. Any remaining undigested food moves along your large bowel until your body gets rid of waste through your poo.



Nearly all bowel cancers develop in your large bowel, which includes the colon and rectum. Bowel cancer starts to develop when cells in the inner lining of your bowel become damaged and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumour. Bowel cancer can also develop from small lumps called polyps.

Who is most likely to develop bowel cancer?

Although bowel cancer is common in both men and women, over half of new bowel cancer cases are diagnosed in men. Bowel cancer is also more common as you get older. Most cases of bowel cancer are diagnosed in people over the age of 50.

As with all cancers, the chance of developing bowel cancer is different for each person and isn't caused by just one factor.

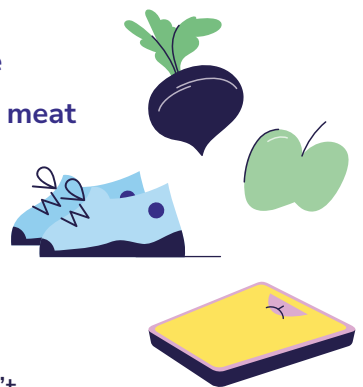
There are many different factors that can increase or decrease your chance of developing bowel cancer. Many of them are factors you can control, such as what you eat.

Risk factors

Risk factors are things that increase your chance of developing bowel cancer. Some risk factors are beyond your control such as age, family history of bowel cancer, or a personal history of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease.

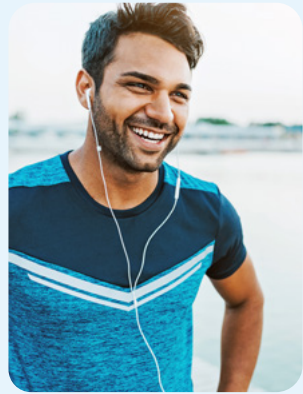
But there are some factors that you can control that can increase your risk, such as:

- **Not eating enough wholegrains and fibre**
- **Eating processed meat and too much red meat**
- **Not doing enough physical activity**
- **Living with overweight or obesity**
- **Drinking alcohol**
- **Smoking tobacco**



If any of the risk factors apply to you, it doesn't mean you will develop bowel cancer – it just means your risk is higher. But every change you make can help lower your risk.

LOWERING YOUR RISK



Eat more wholegrains and fibre

There is strong scientific evidence that eating wholegrains and foods containing fibre lowers your risk of developing bowel cancer.



Wholegrain foods keep all parts of the grain they're made from. When wholegrains are refined to make whiter grains, like white flour, the fibre and certain nutrients are removed. These are the parts of the grain that can help support your health, so we recommend choosing wholegrain varieties of grain products such as wholewheat pasta, wholemeal bread and brown rice.

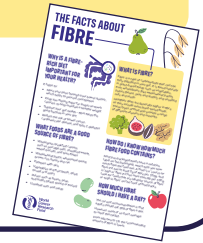
Fibre is a type of carbohydrate found in a variety of plant-based foods. It supports a healthy digestive system and helps keep your bowel movements regular. Fibre is found naturally in vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, pulses (like beans, peas, and lentils), and unsalted nuts and seeds.

It is recommended that adults eat 30g of fibre a day, but most of us eat less than this.

Aim to eat a variety of at least five portions of vegetables and fruit a day. Vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and sweet potato, and fruits such as avocado, berries and apples, are particularly good sources of fibre.



Our fibre factsheet has advice and many tips on how to get more fibre in your diet: wcrf-uk.org/fibre



Limit red meat and avoid processed meat

There is strong scientific evidence that eating processed meat and too much red meat increases your risk of bowel cancer.



Processed meat is any meat that has been preserved by smoking, curing, salting or adding chemical preservatives.

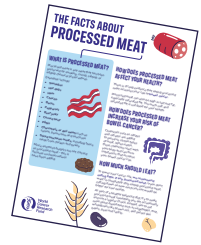
To lower your bowel cancer risk, we recommend eating little, if any, processed meat. Processed meat can also be high in salt and saturated fat, so avoiding it or cutting down as much as possible is better for your health.

Examples of processed meat:

- Sausages
- Ham
- Bacon
- Pepperoni
- Hot dogs
- Beef jerky



Find out more about processed meat and for tips to help you cut down in our **processed meat factsheet**: wcrf-uk.org/processed-meat



Red meat includes beef, pork, lamb and goat.

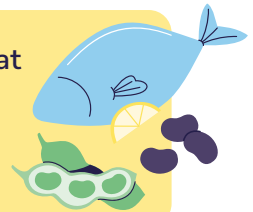
Red meat is a good source of nutrients like protein, iron, and vitamin B12 so it can form part of a healthy balanced diet. But you shouldn't eat it every day as eating too much can increase your risk of developing bowel cancer.

We recommend eating no more than three portions of red meat a week, a total of around 350–500g in cooked weight.



One portion of red meat is around the same size as a deck of playing cards or the size of the palm of your hand. It's also best to opt for lean cuts and trim off any visible fat.

Try meat-free days, or swap processed and red meat for skinless poultry (such as chicken and turkey), fish, or plant-based sources of protein such as tofu, and pulses like beans, chickpeas and lentils.



For lots of healthy recipes to try, visit: wcrf-uk.org/recipes



Move more

There is strong scientific evidence that physical activity lowers your risk of developing bowel cancer. This may be because physical activity helps you maintain a healthy weight and helps food move faster through your digestive system.



In the UK, adults are recommended to do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, like brisk walking, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity, like running.



You should also try to do at least two muscle strengthening activities a week, like carrying heavy shopping, yoga and exercises that use your bodyweight like push-ups and squats.



You should also try to limit how much time you spend sitting down.

Being physically active doesn't mean you have to go to the gym – all forms of movement count such as walking, gardening, and household chores.



For more support on getting more active, explore our guide Living an active life: wcrf-uk.org/activelife



Maintain a healthy weight

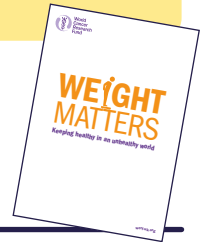
There is strong scientific evidence that being a healthy weight lowers your risk of developing 12 different types of cancers, including bowel cancer.



To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, aim to eat a healthy balanced diet and move more throughout your day.

Measuring your body mass index (BMI) is a simple way to check if you're a healthy weight for your height. Calculate your BMI here: wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator

Explore our Weight matters guide for more tips and advice on losing weight: wcrf-uk.org/weightmatters



Think about what you drink

There is strong scientific evidence that drinking alcohol increases your risk of bowel cancer – and at least five other types of cancers – so for cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol at all. If you choose to drink, it is recommended to drink no more than 14 units a week spread over three days.



One small
125ml
glass of
wine is
1.5 units



One pint
of normal
strength beer,
lager or cider
is 2 units



One 25ml
measure of
spirits such as
vodka or whiskey
is 1 unit

It's also important to remember that alcoholic drinks can have a lot of calories. To see how many calories there are in alcoholic drinks, try our alcohol calorie calculator: wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator

Choose alcohol-free drinks or try having more alcohol-free days during the week. For more tips on cutting down on alcohol, check out: wcrf-uk.org/alcohol



Stop smoking

Tobacco smoke contains many known carcinogens – substances that cause cancer. Many people know that smoking causes lung cancer, but it can also cause many other cancer types including bowel cancer. Choosing not to smoke is an important way to lower your risk of bowel cancer. For support and services to help you cut down or stop, your doctor can advise and refer you.

For more information on protecting yourself against cancer, as well as practical advice on healthy eating, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight, visit wcrf-uk.org



Symptoms and screening

Symptoms to look out for

It is important to speak to your doctor if you have persistent:

- Blood in your poo
- Changes in your bowel habits, particularly more frequent or runnier poo
- Pain in your lower tummy, bloating or discomfort from eating

It is most likely nothing to worry about, but it could be the early signs of bowel cancer. That's why it's important to get it checked by your doctor.

Bowel cancer screening

If you're registered with a GP in the UK, you're automatically sent a bowel screening test every two years if you're between:

- 60 and 74 years old in England (expanding to 50 years and over before 2026)
- 50 and 74 years old in Scotland
- 55 and 74 years old in Wales
- 60 and 74 years old in Northern Ireland

If you're aged 75 or over, you can request a testing kit every two years free of charge.



Call your local bowel screening helpline for more information:

England: **0800 707 6060**

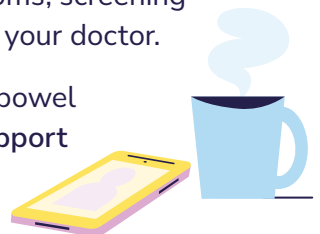
Wales: **0800 294 3370**

Scotland: **0800 012 1833**

Northern Ireland: **0800 015 2514**

For more information about bowel cancer symptoms, screening and FAQs, visit: [nhs.uk/bowelcancer](https://www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer) or speak to your doctor.

For more information on tests and treatment for bowel and other cancers, contact Macmillan Cancer Support on **0808 808 0000** or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)



CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS



Be a healthy weight



Be physically active



Eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans



Limit consumption of 'fast foods' and other processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars



Limit consumption of red and processed meat



Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks



Limit alcohol consumption



Do not use supplements for cancer prevention



For mothers: breastfeed your baby, if you can



After a cancer diagnosis: follow our Recommendations, if you can

Not smoking and avoiding other exposure to tobacco and excess sun are also important in reducing cancer risk.

Following these Recommendations is likely to reduce intakes of salt, saturated and trans fats, which together will help prevent other non-communicable diseases.

To read our full Recommendations visit: wcrf-uk.org/10ways

ABOUT WORLD CANCER RESEARCH FUND

World Cancer Research Fund examines how diet, nutrition, body weight and physical activity affect your risk of developing and surviving cancer.

While society continues searching for a cure, our prevention and survival work is helping people live longer, happier, healthier lives – free from the devastating effects of cancer.

Will you help us build a world where fewer people every day get preventable cancers? Our work is funded solely by charitable donations. Your support will help us continue providing easy-to-access health information to help people reduce their risk of cancer: wcrf-uk.org/donate

For any enquiries or to request the information in large print, please contact us:

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Preventing cancer. Saving lives

All information correct at time of print.
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