



Bowel Cancer Australia

BOWEL CANCER
screening

introduction

Bowel cancer is a huge disease in Australia and will affect 1 in 12 people during their lifetime.

Understanding the symptoms and knowing when to visit your GP for further investigation is essential to ensure the disease is picked up early and treated successfully . . . maybe even prevented.

Bowel cancer screening aims to pick up bowel cancer at any early stage (in people without symptoms) and when treatment is more likely to be effective. Research has shown that screening men and women for bowel cancer using Faecal Occult Blood (FOB) testing can reduce the mortality rate from bowel cancer by 16 per cent in those invited for screening.¹

In this booklet, firstly we explain the symptoms that everyone should be aware of and the investigations available to you if you are displaying these symptoms.

We then provide details on the screening options available, including the bowel cancer screening programs and routine screening for people with a family history of bowel cancer.

¹ NHMRC Guidelines for the Prevention, Early Detection and Management of Colorectal Cancer, 2005, p.34.

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Your Vision, Our Future

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bowel cancer: the facts

Bowel cancer is a disease of the large bowel (colon) or rectum. It is also sometimes called colon or colorectal cancer. It is the second largest cause of cancer deaths in Australia, and claims almost 80 lives every week.

Around 1 in 12 people will get bowel cancer at some point in their life, and it affects men and women almost equally. However, of those who do get the disease, around 90% survive if it is caught early.

What causes bowel cancer?

Experts do not know precisely what causes most bowel cancers, and in many cases there are no obvious causes.

However, we do know that diet, lifestyle and family history are the three things most likely to affect a person's chances of developing bowel cancer.

Your risk of bowel cancer increases with age but it does affect younger people (around 7% of people diagnosed with bowel cancer are under the age of 50).

What are the symptoms of bowel cancer?

Not everyone will have symptoms and the symptoms may vary. The most common symptoms to look out for are:

- A persistent change in bowel habit especially going more often or stools becoming looser for several weeks.
- Bleeding from the bottom without any obvious reasons.
- Abdominal pain, especially if severe.
- A lump in your tummy.

Please remember that most of these symptoms will not be cancer. If you have one or more of these symptoms for more than four to six weeks you should go and see your GP.

How can I reduce my risk of developing bowel cancer?

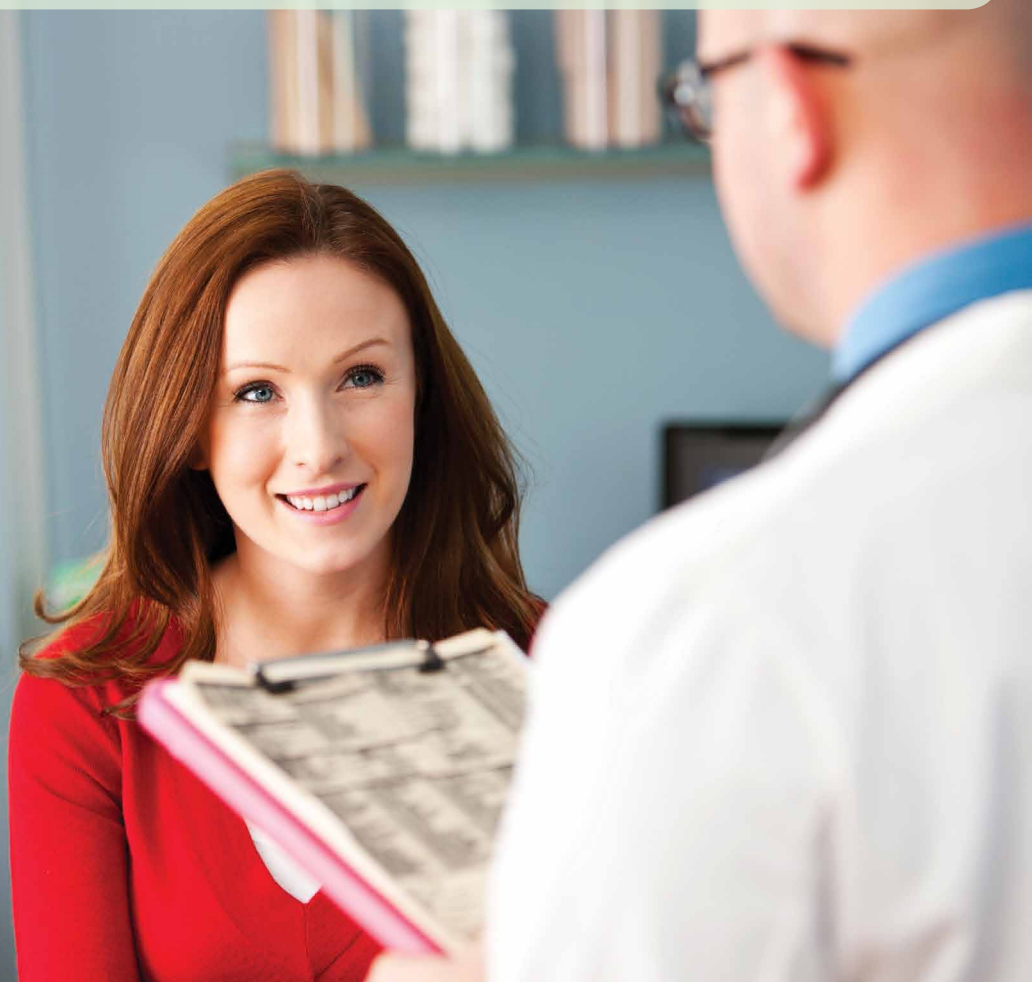
- Eat a healthy diet. This means eating lots of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods and fish, and less fat, red and processed meat.
- Build physical activity into your daily routine and try to keep a healthy weight.
- Stop smoking and cut back on alcohol.
- Know your body and how it usually functions so that you recognise changes in your bowel habits.
- Participate in a screening program when it is applicable to you.



suffering with symptoms?

If you have been experiencing any of the higher-risk symptoms of bowel cancer (see page 3), you should make an appointment to see your GP.

Your GP will ask you questions about your symptoms and how long you have been experiencing them, as well as asking you general questions about your lifestyle and diet to determine any other possible risk factors.



suffering with symptoms?

He or she should usually carry out the following tests:

- A rectal examination, also known as a 'PR' - a painless examination with a gloved finger to feel for any suspicious lumps in the bottom or rectum, which might be cancer.
- A blood test - to see if you are suffering from anaemia, which could be a sign of bowel cancer.

Being referred to the hospital

If your GP thinks that you should have further investigations for bowel cancer, he or she will refer you to a hospital clinic or a specialist.

What are the different investigations for bowel cancer?

Most people who are investigated for bowel cancer will be offered a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy involves looking directly at the lining of the large bowel. A sedative is given and then a thin, flexible tube with a tiny camera attached (a colonoscope) is passed into the back passage and guided around the bowel.

This procedure can detect cancerous tumours and can also detect polyps. Polyps are not cancers, but may develop into cancers over time. They can easily be removed, reducing the risk of bowel cancer developing. If polyps are found, most can be removed painlessly, using a wire loop passed down the colonoscopy tube. These tissue samples are then checked for any abnormal cells that might be cancerous.

A colonoscopy is the most effective way to diagnose bowel cancer and for most people it is a straightforward procedure.

Other possible investigations you may be offered include a flexible sigmoidoscopy, which is similar to a colonoscopy but only looks inside the first 60 centimetres of the bowel, or a barium enema, a special x-ray examination of the bowel.

Virtual colonoscopy (also called a computerised tomography colonography or CT colonography) is a new method that allows doctors to look at the large bowel (colon) to detect polyps and signs of cancer. The CT scanner uses x-rays to produce twodimensional and three-dimensional images of the whole of the colon and rectum.

What next?

When you receive your result, often on the same day as your colonoscopy, remember, each case is individual and you should only use trusted sources of information, such as medical or registered charity sites, to avoid confusion. If the diagnostic tests for bowel cancer are negative, you may be diagnosed with another gut condition and given appropriate treatment.

If polyps have been removed, your specialist will recommend an appropriate plan for future colonoscopy. If you test positively for bowel cancer, you will meet with a specialist who will put together your treatment plan.

national bowel cancer screening program

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) is being phased in over a number of years by the Australian Government. This section aims to answer your questions about the Program and to direct you where to go for the most up-to-date information.

How does the screening process work?

Men and women eligible for screening will automatically receive in the mail an invitation letter, test kit and an information leaflet explaining the Program.

You use the test kit to collect small samples from your bowel motions.

When you return the test (by post), it will be analysed to detect traces of blood that may not be visible to the naked eye. The results are then sent back to you and your nominated GP shortly thereafter.

How does the test work?

The screening program uses an immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT).

Polyps and bowel cancers sometimes bleed, and the test works by detecting tiny amounts of blood which cannot normally be seen in bowel motions.

The test does not diagnose bowel cancer, but the results will indicate whether further investigation (usually a colonoscopy) is needed.



national bowel cancer screening program

I don't like the idea of sending off my bowel motions – why should I take part?

Regular bowel cancer screening has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer. The test can be done in the privacy of your own home and, even if you do feel squeamish about it, remember the huge benefits of being screened.

If bowel cancer is detected, but picked up early by the iFOBT before symptoms develop, it can usually be completely cured. However, if bowel cancer is not detected early, it will progress to a more advanced stage making it much more difficult to treat successfully.

Am I eligible for screening?

Screening for bowel cancer is recommended at least once every two years for people aged 50 and over. You may be eligible to participate in the Australian Government's National Bowel Cancer Screening Program - for more information, please call **1800 118 868** or visit www.cancerscreening.gov.au.

If you develop any symptoms, see your doctor immediately.

Do eligible people have to participate?

No. Participation in the NBCSP is voluntary.

Why is screening not available to everyone over the age of 50?

Bowel Cancer Australia asks the same question regularly of policy makers!

We are lobbying to expand the Program to all Australians over the age of 50 at least once every two years in accordance with National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Guidelines.

We believe expansion of the Program is the key to saving more lives from this disease, and detecting bowel cancers before they reach an advanced stage.

People who are ineligible to participate in the NBCSP can undergo annual screening through their local participating pharmacy or GP (see BowelScreen Australia® - page 8).



If you are invited to take part in the Program, we strongly urge you to participate.

BOWELSCREEN AUSTRALIA®

BowelScreen Australia® is the only national screening program using the most accurate test for bowel cancer, which is easily accessible to all Australians every day of the year.

There are steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting bowel cancer, in particular around healthy eating and regular exercise (see page 3). Get into the habit of eating your 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables every day, and try to build physical activity into your daily routine.

If you are worried about bowel cancer, but not displaying symptoms or eligible to participate in the Government Program, you may like to consider annual screening through your local participating pharmacy or your GP.

BowelScreen Australia® is a pharmacy based bowel cancer awareness, education and screening program for the Australian community using a clinically proven, sensitive and reliable immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT).

BowelScreen Australia® is a collaboration between Bowel Cancer Australia and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, with the support of Enterix Australia (manufacturer and accredited pathology laboratory for the InSure® immunochemical test).

For a small cost (\$21 per kit + pathology) you will be supplied with a BowelScreen Australia® test kit, a reply paid envelope, full instructions, and a dedicated customer helpline.

The test is simple, non-invasive, highly accurate and requires no faecal handling, diet or medication restrictions.

You take samples in the comfort of your own home, complete the personal details card, and return to Enterix Australia. Samples are analysed in their own dedicated laboratory by properly trained personnel. Once analysed, the results are returned to you and your nominated GP within 14 days.



BowelScreen Australia®



A follow-up pathway is in place for this service – one year later you will receive a reminder for re-testing.

A health fund or Medicare rebate may be available.

BowelScreen Australia® test kits can be obtained from your local participating pharmacy or by calling **1800 555 494**.

Please note that Bowel Cancer Australia does not receive any benefit, financial or otherwise, from the promotion of BowelScreen Australia® test kits.

To locate your nearest pharmacy visit www.bowelscreenaustralia.org

Screening for bowel cancer using a sensitive immunochemical faecal occult blood test (iFOBT) is recommended every 1 to 2 years for people aged 50 and over.

It is very important that negative tests are repeated every 1 to 2 years and positive tests are followed by colonoscopy.

a family history of bowel cancer?

Ask around in your family and you may well find someone who has had bowel cancer. But that does not mean you are going to get it. There are two major forms of family bowel cancer disposition.

If you have relatives with bowel cancer, you should discuss this with your GP.

Depending on the number of relatives, their relationship to you and the age at which they developed cancer, your own risk of developing bowel cancer may be above average.

Individual advice from your GP is needed in this situation.

In addition to a family history of bowel cancer, it is also possible to inherit a genetic susceptibility to the disease. The two most common inherited syndromes linked with bowel cancer are HNPCC and FAP. Together they represent the cause of between one and five per cent of all bowel cancer diagnoses.

HNPCC (Lynch syndrome)

Your family may be at risk of having HNPCC syndrome if any of the following features are present:

- At least three family members have had bowel cancer or one of the other associated cancers (eg. womb, renal pelvis, ureter, small bowel), and one person is a close relative of the other two (i.e. parent/ child/sibling).
- At least two successive generations are affected.
- At least one person was diagnosed under 50 years of age.
- A person in the family with two or more bowel cancers, or bowel cancer and one of the other associated cancers.
- Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP) has been excluded from the diagnosis.



a family history of bowel cancer?

Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP)

The other form is familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP). A small percentage of people (FAP patients) with bowel cancer have this inherited condition that makes them more likely to develop hundreds of polyps at a very young age. If these pre-cancerous polyps are removed (surgery is normally advised at a young age) the risk of bowel cancer may be reduced.

What screening options are available to me?

People who have bowel cancer in their family, or a genetic predisposition to the disease, should be offered regular screening regardless of whether they are showing symptoms. Discuss this with your GP.

If you have a first-degree relative who suffered with bowel cancer – and particularly if they were young (under the age of 55) when diagnosed – you should talk to your GP about screening.

Screening is usually recommended for you around 10 years before the age at which your relative developed the disease.

Screening can help to detect polyps, or bowel cancer, at an early stage, and is usually carried out using a procedure called a colonoscopy, rather than iFOBT.

I have bowel cancer – should my family be screened?

If you have bowel cancer, it is important to discuss with your doctor the various screening options recommended for your direct relatives (parents, siblings and children). This is particularly relevant if you are under the age of 55.

What is genetic testing?

If you have been diagnosed with bowel cancer, or you have a relative with bowel cancer who is willing to be tested, you might be offered genetic testing if your doctor thinks that your family is likely to have a genetic mutation in one of the known bowel cancer genes.

Testing is a two-step process: looking for the genetic mutation running in you (mutation searching) and then using that information to look for the mutation in other family members who don't have cancer (predictive testing).



hereditary cancer registries in Australia

NSW & ACT

Hereditary Cancer Registry

c/o Cancer Institute NSW

PO Box 825

Alexandria NSW 1435

Freecall: 1800 505 644

Email: hcr@cancerinstitute.org.au

Web: http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au/cancer_inst/programs/hcr.html

Queensland

Queensland Familial Bowel Cancer Registry (QFBCR)

Genetic Health Queensland (GHQ)

Building C28

Level 4, Back Rd

Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital

Herston QLD 4029

Tel: (07) 3636 1686

Email: ghq@health.qld.gov.au

Web: <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/rbwh/services/ghq.asp>

South Australia

Familial Cancer Unit

SA Clinical Genetics Service

Women's and Children's Hospital

72 King William Road

North Adelaide SA 5006

Tel: (08) 8161 6995

Email: cywhs.famcancer@cywhs.sa.gov.au

Victoria

Family Cancer Register

Victorian Family Cancer Register

c/o The Cancer Council Victoria

1 Rathdowne Street

Carlton VIC 3053

Tel: (03) 9635 5176

Email: vfcr@cancervic.org.au

Web: <http://www.cancervic.org.au/how-we-can-help/family-cancer/fami-can-reg>

Western Australia

Familial Cancer Register

King Edward Memorial Hospital,

Level 3, Agnes Walsh House

374 Bagot Road

Subiaco WA 6008

Tel: (08) 9340 1603

Email: fcpr@health.wa.gov.au

Web: <http://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/services/genetics/index.htm>

Tasmanian

Familial Cancer Register

Tasmanian Clinical Genetics Service c/o

c/o Royal Hobart Hospital

GPO Box 1061

Hobart TAS 7001

Tel: (03) 6222 8296

hereditary cancer registries in New Zealand

New Zealand

Familial Gastrointestinal Cancer Registry

Auckland Office

Auckland City Hospital

Private Bag 92024

Auckland NZ 1142

Freephone: 0800 554 555

Email: NZFamilialGIRegistry@adhb.govt.nz

Canterbury Office

Level 2 Riverside Block

Christchurch Public Hospital

Private Bag 4710

Christchurch NZ 8140

Freephone: 0800 023 445

Email: FBCR@cdhb.govt.nz



further support and useful contacts

About Bowel Cancer Australia

Bowel Cancer Australia is a national charity, dedicated to raising awareness of the disease and to providing support and information for those affected by bowel cancer. Being diagnosed with bowel cancer will come as a terrible shock to most people. Whilst you will receive all your medical help and support from your healthcare professionals, you may also like to contact the charity to talk to other patients in a similar situation, speak to a nurse or nutritionist adviser, or receive further information about any aspect of your disease.

Patients, and their families, contact us at every stage of their bowel cancer journey, but many find us of particular help and comfort when they are having a break from treatment, or have finished treatment, and are no longer having that day-to-day support from the hospital.

'Love My Family' Community

The charity runs a national patient-to-patient network for people with bowel cancer, or relatives of bowel cancer patients. We can put people in touch with each other, by phone or email, matching them by age, geographical region, bowel cancer stage, or treatment received. Talking to someone else who has been through a similar experience can be hugely reassuring, and many patients who initially contact the Community for support go on to become members, providing support to others.

Nurse & Nutritionist Advisory Services

You will have a number of contacts at your local hospital who can answer specific questions about your treatment, and you should not be afraid to ask for help if you are worried at any stage of your bowel cancer journey. The charity also provides a Nurse and Nutritionist Advisory Service, which you may wish to call if you can't get hold of your assigned nurse, or if you have any other questions or worries.

Information Resources

The charity publishes a range of patient information, all available to order free of charge from the charity.

Please call **1800 555 494** or visit **www.bowelcanceraustralia.org** for further information.



Bowel Cancer Australia

Love.

BOWEL CANCER AUSTRALIA

I would like to support the work of Bowel Cancer Australia.

Your donation will not only help us to save lives, but also improve the health and wellbeing of those living with bowel cancer.

Please accept my donation of \$ _____ (donations over \$2 are tax-deductible).

My cheque / money order is enclosed (payable to Bowel Cancer Australia).

Or please debit my: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ Diners

Card number: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Name on card: _____ Expiry date: ____ / ____ / ____

Signature: _____

Please note, if you prefer to donate by phone or online,
please call **1800 555 494**
or visit **www.bowelcanceraustralia.org**

My contact details

Title: _____ First Name: _____ Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Suburb: _____

State: _____ Postcode: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Preferred method of contact: ☐ Post ☐ Email

Thank you on behalf of Bowel Cancer Australia.

Privacy statement: Your name will be placed on our mailing list and, from time to time, we will send you information about Bowel Cancer Australia. If you do not wish to receive such information, please tick this box ☐. Please call 1800 555 494 should you require any further information.

Bowel Cancer Australia is a national charity working to reduce the impact of bowel cancer in our society through awareness, education, support and research. We aim to help save lives from this common cancer, Australia's second biggest cancer killer.

Charity initiatives such as Bowel Cancer Awareness Week®, BowelScreen Australia®, and the Healthy Community Program raise awareness among health professionals and the community about the importance of early detection and intervention in the successful treatment of bowel cancer.

Through our 'Love My Family' Community, we provide support, resources and advocacy for bowel cancer patients, their carers, close relatives and friends.

To do all this we rely on public support. If you would like to get involved, or make a donation, please visit our website.

www.bowelcanceraustralia.org



Bowel Cancer Australia

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