

National Bowel Screening Programme

In New Zealand, a bowel cancer screening programme is being rolled out region by region for those without symptoms. For more information, talk to your doctor or visit the Ministry of Health's website: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/cancer-programme/bowel-cancer-programme/national-bowel-screening-programme

What you should look for

If you notice any of the following symptoms and they last longer than four to six weeks, tell your doctor:

- Bleeding from your bottom or blood in your bowel motion.
- A recent change in your bowel motions that lasts for four to six weeks (going to the toilet more often, diarrhoea, or a feeling that your bowel does not empty completely).
- Stomach pain, frequent wind pain, bloating or cramp.
- A mass or growth in your stomach (abdomen).

Most people who have these symptoms will not be diagnosed with bowel cancer. Because bowel cancer is common in New Zealand, it's important to recognise any changes to your normal bowel routine, and to discuss these with your doctor.

Some people with early bowel cancer may not notice any change to their normal bowel function. If you have any concerns about your risk of bowel cancer, talk to your doctor.



More Information

For more information about bowel cancer, contact your local Cancer Society or call the Cancer Information Helpline 0800 CANCER (226 237). You can also visit our website www.cancernz.org.nz

Notes



This leaflet was published in 2017 by the Cancer Society of New Zealand. The Cancer Society's leaflets are reviewed every three years.

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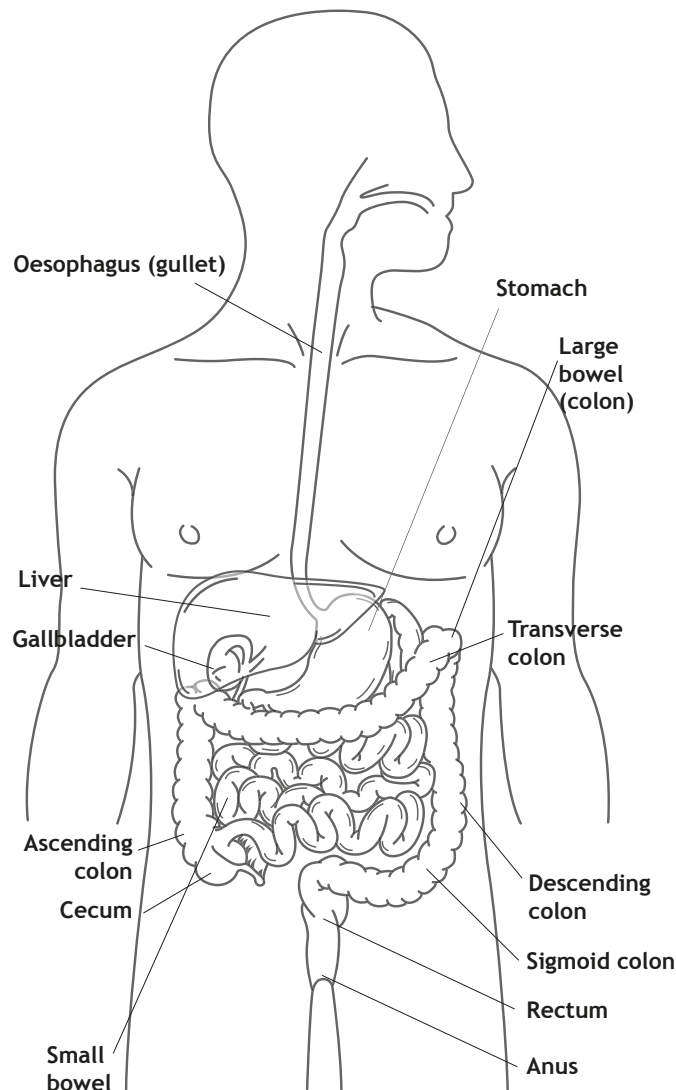
Bowel cancer awareness



Understanding your bowel



The digestive system



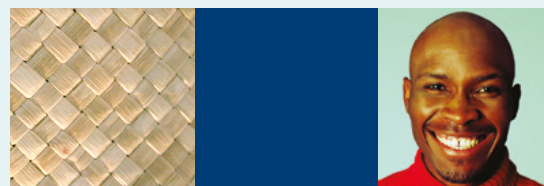
Your bowel (colon and rectum)

The bowel is a very important part of your body that helps you digest and absorb food and water. It extends from the stomach and stops at the anus. It is in two main parts - the small bowel (sometimes called the small intestine) and the large bowel (or large intestine). The large bowel is made up of the colon and the rectum.

The bowel is a tube that is made of a lining that absorbs food and water. It is surrounded by muscle to help squeeze the food along. Cancer of the small bowel is rare. Cancer of the large bowel is one of the most common cancers in New Zealand. If you have a family history of bowel cancer, talk to your doctor about your risk of bowel cancer and whether you should have regular surveillance or a colonoscopy. If caught early, bowel cancer is very treatable.

How the bowel works

Food and liquid is broken down in the stomach. It is then digested in the small bowel, before passing into the large bowel. Here water and some nutrients are absorbed, leaving waste. Waste passes through the rest of the large bowel before leaving the body as a bowel motion (poo) when you go to the toilet.



Looking after your bowel

Some 'everyday' things you can do that may reduce your risk of developing bowel cancer:

- Aim to be a healthy weight throughout your life. Weight gain, especially around the waist, is linked to bowel cancer.
- Eat mostly plant foods (vegetables, fruit, grains, legumes and pulses).
- Choose wholemeal and whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Eat smaller and fewer servings of red meat and avoid processed meats.
- Eat foods low in fat, salt and sugar.
- Be physically active every day. At least one hour per day of moderate activity (e.g., a brisk walk) lowers your risk of bowel cancer, but vigorous activity (e.g., soccer or running) several times per week is likely to have an even greater benefit.
- Limit alcoholic drinks to one drink for women per day, and two drinks per day for men, or ideally don't drink alcohol at all.
- Don't smoke.

