

The bowel screening test

Your questions answered



Helping you decide



Bowel cancer is Scotland's third most common cancer, with almost 4,000 people diagnosed every year.



Bowel screening is the most effective way to find bowel cancer early, when it can often be cured.



The bowel screening test can spot hidden blood in your bowel motion (poo) – that you or your GP wouldn't know was there – which can often be a sign of bowel cancer.



It only takes a few days to complete the test in the privacy of your own home and it could save your life.



All men and women aged over 50 in Scotland can take part in bowel screening by completing a bowel screening test at home every two years.



Making a decision to do the bowel screening test is a personal choice. So this leaflet aims to answer any questions you might have, to help you decide.



If you have any questions about taking the test, just contact the Bowel Screening Centre.

Helpline: **0800 0121 833**
(textphone 18001 0800 0121 833)

email:

bowelscreening.tayside@nhs.net

The advisers will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy.

Who is the bowel screening test for?

If you're between 50 and 74

Because there's a bigger risk of bowel cancer developing once you reach 50, we'll automatically send you a test every two years until you're 75.

If you're over 75

If you're over 75 you can still take a bowel screening test every two years if you want to. We won't automatically send you a test every two years though, so you'll need to ask us for one. It's still free – just call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline (see page 3).



Whatever your age, make an appointment to see your doctor if you notice any of the symptoms on page 10.

Why take the test?

There are many important reasons for taking the home bowel screening test:

- Home testing prevents 150 deaths from bowel cancer every year.
- Home testing can find bowel cancer at an early stage – even if you’ve had no symptoms.
- When bowel cancer is detected early, it can often be cured.
- Bowel cancer is Scotland’s third most common cancer, with almost 4,000 people diagnosed every year.
- Bowel cancer is more common in people over 50, especially men.
- The test can find other changes in your bowel, such as non-cancerous growths called ‘polyps’. Most of these can be removed easily, and this can prevent cancer from developing.



When bowel cancer is found early, it can often be cured.

Are there any disadvantages with the test?

The test picks up the majority of bowel cancers, but isn't 100% accurate. That's because the test looks for blood, but not all cancers bleed all the time. Research is ongoing to make the screening test even more accurate.



Changes in your bowel can happen between one screening test and the next, so it's important for you to repeat the screening test every two years. Talk to your doctor if you notice any of the symptoms on page 10.

What does the test involve?

It's a clean, simple way for you to put small samples of your bowel motion (poo) on a test card. You then post the card (Freepost) to the Bowel Screening Centre for testing.

The test looks for hidden blood in your bowel motion (poo), a key sign of bowel cancer.

This might all sound a bit embarrassing. Don't worry – it's not difficult to do. It just takes three visits to the toilet.

Full instructions are given with the test. You can also watch a short film about how to do the test at **www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/bowel/takingthetest**

But if you have a question, just call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline on **0800 0121 833** (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833) or email **bowelscreening.tayside@nhs.net**

The advisers will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy.

I have a health condition – can I still take the test?

Yes, people with health conditions can do the test. This includes people who:

- have diabetes
- are on blood-thinning tablets, iron tablets and/or antibiotics
- have a bowel condition.

People who have haemorrhoids (piles) should also take the test as it is possible to have piles and bowel cancer. The test looks for hidden blood, not blood that you can see.

Results of your test

Once you've sent your test to the Bowel Screening Centre, they'll post your result to you in two weeks.

If your result shows small traces of blood

You will be sent a different test with instructions. This is quite common and doesn't always mean there's a problem, but it is important that you do a second test.

What if my result is positive?

It means that blood has been found in your bowel motion (poo). It is important to find out if this is a sign of cancer or something else less serious. We will write to tell you about the next test that will be offered by your local Health Board.

The usual way of finding where the blood is coming from is called a colonoscopy. A thin, flexible tube will be used to examine your bowel. This takes place in hospital as a morning or afternoon outpatient appointment, so you shouldn't need to stay in hospital for more than a few hours. The colonoscopy takes about half an hour and is a very safe investigation. Any risks will be explained to you in detail if you need this test and you will be told about any findings before you leave.

If you want to know more about colonoscopy, call the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline (see page 3).

How many people get a positive result?

- About 10 in every 500 people taking the test will have a positive result, meaning blood was found in their bowel motion (poo).
- When those 10 people have the recommended follow-up tests, it's likely that only one of them will have cancer.
- Of the other nine people, four will have polyps (pre-cancerous growths).
- The other five will be clear. This is because their screening test showed blood, but their follow-up checks showed no cancer or polyps.
- The test can't be 100% accurate, as not all polyps and cancers bleed. So it's very important to keep testing yourself every two years and to never ignore symptoms (listed on page 10).

What if my result is negative?

Most people have a negative result. That means no blood was found in your bowel motion (poo). We will send you another test in two years, but always be watchful for symptoms.

It's still worth keeping yourself healthy to reduce your risk of cancer. There are some tips about how to do this on page 12.

What are the symptoms I should look for?

These symptoms can be caused by a number of conditions, not just cancer. But if you've noticed any of these yourself, make an appointment to tell your doctor:

- Repeated bleeding from your bottom or blood in your bowel motion (poo).
- A recent change in your bowel motion (poo) that continues every day for over four weeks, without going back to normal.
- Watery poo on its own or with constipation (constipation on its own is less likely to be serious).
- Severe pain in your stomach that won't go away, especially after eating.
- You've recently lost weight without trying.
- People say you look pale and you feel tired a lot.

But often there are no symptoms

Usually cancer in the early stages doesn't cause symptoms, but testing yourself could still detect if it's there. Cancer is easier to treat at an early stage so better to be on the safe side and test yourself every two years, even if you feel well.



Changes in your bowel can happen between one screening test and the next, so it's important for you to repeat the screening test every two years. Talk to your doctor if you notice any of the symptoms on page 10.

Can I reduce my risk of bowel cancer?

Yes, there are things you can do to lower your risk of bowel cancer:

- Take a home test every two years.
- Eat high-fibre foods like wholemeal bread, cereal or beans.
- Avoid processed meat and limit red meat to no more than three or four times a week. Red meat includes steak, mince, chops and sausages and processed meats that have flavours added, like ham, bacon, hot dogs or salami.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Be physically active (for example, by walking) for at least 150 minutes a week. This can be in short bursts of 10 minutes or more.
- Keep to a healthy weight.
- Limit your alcohol to less than three units a day for men and less than two units a day for women. And have two alcohol-free days every week. To see what a unit is, visit **www.drinksmarter.org**
- Do not smoke. If you smoke, there is lots of support available to help you stop. Call Smokeline on **0800 84 84 84** or visit **www.canstopsmoking.com** to find out more.

- Don't be embarrassed to tell your doctor if you have any worries about your bowel habits. You'll feel better after talking about it.

For more information about staying healthy, visit **www.takelifeon.co.uk**

How we use your medical information

Make sure your doctor has your current address on record, so we can send you regular screening tests.

The Scottish Bowel Screening Programme records your personal details and results of tests to monitor and improve the programme.

Only screening staff and those involved in your care will see your information. You have the right to object to the use of your information for these purposes and the NHS is obliged to agree, if it's possible to do so. However, this would reduce our ability to monitor the effectiveness of the service and make improvements. You have the right to see information that the screening centre holds about you and you can get a copy on request.

Screening information may be used for research, public health, education and training purposes. Any test samples and information used in this way will have your personal details removed.

If you need more advice about use of personal information or how to access information held about you, please contact the Bowel Screening Centre Helpline (details below).



The advisers at the Bowel Screening Centre will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy. Contact the Helpline on 0800 0121 833 (textphone 18001 0800 0121 833).

This publication is available online
at **www.healthscotland.com**

Traditional Chinese

您也可以登入

www.healthscotland.com 瀏覽

本刊物，或撥打 **0131 314 5300** 查詢。

Polish

Ta publikacja jest dostępna
online na stronie

www.healthscotland.com

lub pod numerem telefonu

0131 314 5300, gdzie
można także zgłaszać
wszelkie zapytania.

Urdu

یہ اشاعت آن لائن

www.healthscotland.com

پر دستیاب ہے یا کسی سوالات کے لیے

0131 314 5300 پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

This resource is available in Urdu, Chinese
and Polish, and in an Easy Read format.
NHS Health Scotland is happy to consider
requests for other languages and formats.

Please contact **0131 314 5300** or email
nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net

Bowel Screening:

Scottish Bowel Screening Programme

If you have any questions about taking the test, just contact the Bowel Screening Centre.

Helpline: **0800 0121 833**

(textphone 18001 0800 0121 833)

email:

bowelscreening.tayside@nhs.net

The advisers will be glad to help you and they'll respect your privacy.

www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/bowel
www.healthscotland.com