

Bowel cancer symptoms you should never ignore



Bowel cancer, also known as **colorectal cancer**, is one of the most common cancers worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It accounts for approximately **10% of all cancer cases**, ranking as the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths globally.

Bowel cancer affects the large bowel, including the colon and rectum. While it can occur at any age, it is **more common in people over 50**. Early detection is crucial because treatments are more effective when the cancer is localised and hasn't spread to other parts of the body.

Knowing how to spot the key symptoms and when to seek help could make all the difference. Here's **what you need to know about the symptoms**, when to see a doctor, and **how to prepare for screenings**.

What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, **affects the large bowel**. Most cases develop in the colon or rectum. While it can occur at any age, it's more common in people over 50. Early detection is crucial because **treatments are more effective when the cancer is still localised** and hasn't spread to other parts of the body.



Symptoms to watch out for

Bowel cancer doesn't always cause noticeable symptoms in the early stages, but there are some warning signs you should never ignore. If you experience any of these symptoms, it's a good idea to **book an appointment with your GP** to discuss your concerns.

Changes in bowel habits

Keep an eye out for changes that last more than three-to-four weeks, such as:

- Diarrhoea or constipation without a clear reason
- Feeling like you haven't emptied your bowels fully after going to the toilet
- A sudden urge to go more often than usual
- Blood in your stool

Finding blood in your stool can be alarming, but it doesn't always mean cancer.

Haemorrhoids (piles) or **minor tears** in the anus can also cause bleeding. However, if you notice blood that's dark or mixed with your stool, **see a doctor promptly**.



Unexplained weight loss

Losing weight without trying could be a sign of several health issues, including bowel cancer. This happens because the cancer can affect **how your body absorbs nutrients** or cause a **loss of appetite**.

Tummy pain or discomfort

Persistent pain, bloating, or cramping in your tummy could be a sign of something more serious. It's worth mentioning these symptoms to your doctor, especially if they don't go away.



Extreme tiredness

Feeling unusually tired all the time can be linked to **anaemia**, which sometimes happens in bowel cancer due to bleeding in the bowel. If you're **constantly fatigued, even after rest**, speak to your GP.

A lump in your tummy or rectum

In some cases, bowel cancer may cause a **noticeable lump**. If you feel anything unusual, don't ignore it.

When to see a doctor

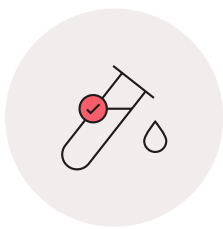
It's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to your health. See a GP if:

- You have any of the symptoms mentioned above for more than a few weeks
- You notice blood in your stool that doesn't go away
- There's a family history of bowel cancer, especially if symptoms develop early

Most of the time, **these symptoms won't be cancer**, but it's important to rule it out.

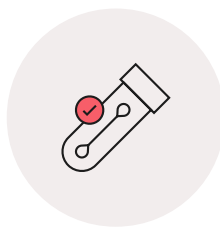
What happens at the GP?

Your GP will ask about your symptoms and might perform a physical examination. If needed, they'll refer you for **further tests**, such as:



A blood test:

To check for anaemia and other possible causes.



A stool test:

To look for hidden blood in your stool.



A colonoscopy:

A camera examination of your bowel to check for abnormalities.

Preparing for a bowel cancer screening

Screening can detect bowel cancer early, often before symptoms appear, by identifying small amounts of hidden blood in your stool that might indicate a problem.

Screening programmes are critical for early detection. Many countries use **faecal immunochemical tests (FIT)** or **colonoscopies** to identify issues before symptoms appear. You can also request a home test kit to collect a small sample of your stool, which you send to a lab for testing.

If you're called for a colonoscopy, don't worry. The procedure is **safe** and **usually takes about 30 minutes to an hour**. You'll be given clear instructions on how to prepare, including dietary advice and laxatives to empty your bowel.

Reducing your risk

While not all cases of bowel cancer can be prevented, adopting healthy habits can help lower your risk:

- **Eat more fibre:** Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables help keep your bowels healthy.
- **Cut down on processed and red meat:** Too much can increase your risk.
- **Stay active:** Regular exercise supports a healthy digestive system.
- **Avoid smoking and limit alcohol:** Both are linked to a higher risk of bowel cancer.
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Being overweight can increase your chances of developing the disease.



Bowel cancer is a serious condition, but early detection can make all the difference. Pay attention to your body and **don't ignore potential warning signs**. Screening is quick, easy, and **could save your life**. If in doubt, speak to your GP. Early action can make a significant difference, and support is always available.

Contact [HealthHero](#) today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.