

## Questions your GP might ask

**Has the frequency with which you go to the toilet to pass or try to pass bowel motions increased? Have your bowel motions become persistently looser over a few weeks?**

A persistent change in bowel habits is an important sign of bowel cancer. People with these symptoms at any age should be referred for a colonoscopy.

**If you have rectal bleeding, do you also have any other symptoms such as straining, lumps, soreness or itchiness?**

These symptoms together are more indicative of piles. However, unexplained bleeding should always be investigated.

**Does bowel cancer run in your family?**

Your GP should ask this as a matter of course but if not, remember to mention any family history of bowel cancer.

**Can I give you a rectal examination and order some blood tests?**

Your GP should offer anyone with rectal bleeding an internal check to feel for masses. Blood tests can check for anaemia – another possible sign of bowel cancer.

**How long have you been experiencing symptoms?**

Most symptoms are due to common conditions and are not bowel cancer. However it is important to be as precise as possible about when symptoms started.

## Bowel cancer screening

Screening by Faecal Occult Blood (FOB) test is for people of average risk of bowel cancer, with no symptoms and no family history of the condition. Everyone else should see their doctor for specific advice about their circumstances.

BowelScreen Australia test kits are available from many community pharmacies.



Bowel Cancer Australia

**BOWELSCREEN**  
AUSTRALIA

Join the  
Bowel ovement

Bowel Cancer Australia works to reduce the impact of bowel cancer in the community through advocacy, awareness, education, support and research.

To do this, the charity relies on public support. To get involved call:

**1800 555 494**

or visit

**bowelcanceraustralia.org**

# DON'T SIT ON YOUR SYMPTOMS



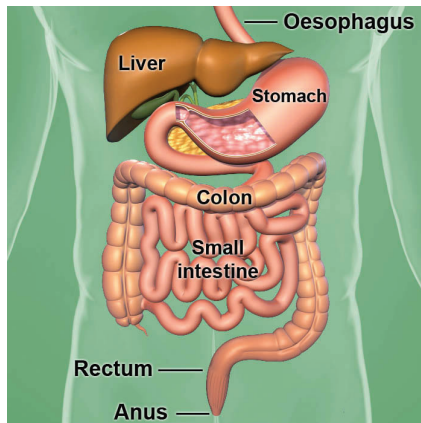
find out about  
**bowel cancer**



Bowel Cancer Australia

## What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer (also known as colorectal cancer) is cancer in any part of the colon or rectum. If caught early enough, bowel cancer is one of the most curable cancers. However if it is not detected or treated early, bowel cancers will continue to grow, spreading beyond the bowel to other organs and making it much harder to treat.



## How common is bowel cancer?

- Bowel cancer is the second largest cause of cancer deaths in Australians. Over 14,000 people are diagnosed with the disease each year and about 4,000 will die as a result. That's 77 people dying every week.
- Bowel cancer affects men and women almost equally.
- The risk of developing bowel cancer increases with age. However about 1,000 Australians under the age of 50 are diagnosed with the cancer each year. You should never be told you are too young to have bowel cancer.

## Symptoms of bowel cancer

It is vitally important to recognise possible symptoms and have them investigated if they persist. Around 90 per cent of bowel cancer cases can be treated successfully if caught in time.

### What to look out for...

It is important to be aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer:

- **A persistent change in bowel habit**, especially going more often or looser, more diarrhoea-like motions, for several weeks
- **Rectal bleeding**
- **Abdominal pain**, especially if severe
- **Unexplained anaemia** causing tiredness or weight loss
- **A lump or mass in your stomach**

If you are experiencing any of the above, **talk to your doctor**. Don't be embarrassed or scared - they've heard it all before.

It is better to visit your GP early and be reassured or treated than to hope symptoms will disappear or improve without treatment. A visit to your GP could save your life.



## What else could it be?

### Piles or haemorrhoids

Usually have other symptoms like swelling, pain and itching. Your GP or pharmacist will be able to recommend various over-the-counter products to treat the condition.

### Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Has a collection of symptoms, such as pain and change in bowel habits. Changes to your diet may be recommended.

### Polyps

Wart-like growths on the bowel lining which can cause bleeding. These can be removed during colonoscopy as some can develop into cancers.

### Anal fissures

Split or tear in the anus area, sometimes caused by constipation. Can be treated with special creams.

### Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis can increase the risk of bowel cancer. Talk to your GP about being regularly monitored for bowel cancer.