

bowel cancer the facts

- In Ireland, approximately 2,000 people each year develop cancer of the bowel, also known as colon, rectal or colorectal cancer
- Bowel cancer affects both men and women
- It is the fourth most common cancer in Ireland following skin cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer
- Bowel cancer is also the second most common cause of cancer death in Ireland
- There is a one in nineteen chance of developing the disease in your lifetime
- The risk increases with age
- When bowel cancer is caught at the earliest stage, more than nine in 10 people will survive for more than five years

The bowel and bowel cancer

The bowel is part of the digestive system. It is divided into two:

- The small bowel or small intestine
- The large bowel or colon and rectum

The food we eat ends up in 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. Bowel cancer is cancer of the large bowel - colon and rectum.

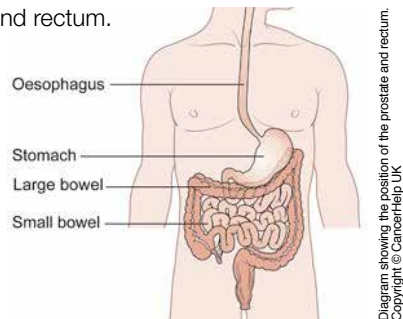


Diagram showing the position of the prostate and rectum.
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Risks and causes of bowel cancer

The causes of most cases bowel cancer are still unknown but research is going on all the time to establish why some people develop this disease. Researchers have already found several risk factors that may increase your chances of developing bowel cancer. These include:

- **Age** – more than seven in 10 cases are in people over the age of 65. It is unusual for people under the age of 50 to get the disease
- **Diet** - bowel cancer appears to be associated with diet. The incidence of bowel cancer is higher in countries that have a low intake of fibre and a high intake of fat
- **Family history** - a family history of bowel cancer (at least three close relatives) may increase the risk of getting the disease
- **Polyps (small growths in the bowel)** - may increase the risk
- **Bowel diseases** - people who have had ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease for a long time also have an increased risk of developing bowel cancer. Ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease are diseases of the lining of the bowel

What to look out for

- Blood in, or on, the stools (bowel motions) - the blood may be bright red or dark in colour
- A change in normal bowel habits such as diarrhoea or constipation for no obvious reason, lasting longer than six weeks
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum (back passage)
- A feeling of not having emptied your bowel properly after a bowel motion

Other diseases apart from bowel cancer can cause all of the above symptoms. However, if you experience any of these symptoms make an appointment with your GP to get checked out.

How you can reduce your risk

Bowel health is important. It may help to reduce your risk of developing bowel cancer if you eat:

- More fibres from cereals, beans, fruit and vegetables
- Less fat including fatty meats and dairy foods
- More poultry such as chicken and turkey, and fewer portions of red meat
- Less cured and processed meat such as bacon, sausages and ham
- More oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, tuna and sardines
- Less sugary and fatty processed foods such as cakes biscuits and chocolate

You can also reduce your risk by:

- Doing at least half an hour of moderate physical activity five times a week. The more active you are, the more you cut the risk of bowel cancer
- Keeping a healthy weight
- Drinking less alcohol. The less alcohol you drink, the lower the risk of bowel cancer and many other cancers and diseases
- Being a non – smoker. If you smoke try to quit. To speak to an advisor, call the HSE Quit Team on Freephone 1800 201 203 or FREETEXT QUIT to 50100

If a member of your family has been diagnosed with bowel cancer you should consult your doctor who may suggest a simple test to detect blood in your bowel motions (stools). There is more information on this test, called a FIT, on the next page. Remember, early detection of the disease is your best chance of a cure.

Screening for Bowel Cancer

Bowel screening aims to find bowel cancer at an early stage in people who have no symptoms. It is done with a simple home test called a FIT (faecal immunochemical test) which looks for tiny, invisible amounts of blood in your stool. The stool test does not tell you if you have bowel cancer but it might tell you that you need more tests, such as a colonoscopy.

A colonoscopy is an examination of your bowel using a camera on the end of a thin flexible tube to look for any signs of disease in the lining of your bowel. A small sample of the lining of your bowel (biopsy) may be taken to look at more closely.

Bowel screening may also find other changes in the bowel, such as polyps, which are small growths that are not cancer but, if not removed, might turn into cancer. If polyps are found, they can be removed easily.

BowelScreen – The National Bowel Screening Programme offers regular, free bowel screening to men and women aged 60 to 69. Bowel screening involves a free, quick, easy-to-use home test every two years while in the age-range. You simply collect a stool sample on a sampling stick provided in your test kit and send it back to BowelScreen for analysis. You can call BowelScreen on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 to check if you are on the register.

Screening results

Once you have sent your sample to BowelScreen, you will get a letter with the results in four weeks. Most people will have a normal result. If your results are not normal, this means that blood was found in your stool sample. It does not necessarily mean that you have bowel cancer but it does mean that you may need to have a colonoscopy.

How bowel cancer is treated

Treatment depends on the stage of the cancer and where it is in the bowel. The main treatments for bowel cancer include surgery, chemotherapy, biological therapy and radiotherapy. It is important that you discuss your treatment with your doctor and let them know if you have any questions or concerns.

About the Marie Keating Foundation

Following their mother Marie's death in 1998, the Keating family promised that they would do everything they could to bring an end to breast cancer. They committed to provide all women and their families with the necessary information to prevent cancer or detect it at its earliest stages. Their collective aim was **"making cancer less frightening by enlightening"**.

Through its community information service, the Foundation's dedicated nurses have enlightened over 100,000 people of the causes and risk factors of breast and other cancers. The Foundation is continuing to expand its awareness campaigns on each of the key cancers, at local level through its community outreach approach as well as through national campaigns.

The Foundation finances other areas of need in cancer care. Monies raised help to refurbish hospital oncology waiting rooms in making them more comfortable for patients. A limited comfort fund for those in financial difficulty as a result of their illness provides immediate assistance, when required.

On February 2nd 1998, our mother Marie died from breast cancer. At the time and all through her illness, we could do nothing to help our Mother who had, all our lives, done everything for us. We, the Keating family have set up this charity in her name to try to help and prevent others going through what Mam went through and what we are still going through to this day. This is also to show that such a wonderful mother and person did not die in vain.

Take care,

The Keating Family



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Bowel cancer

What you should know



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