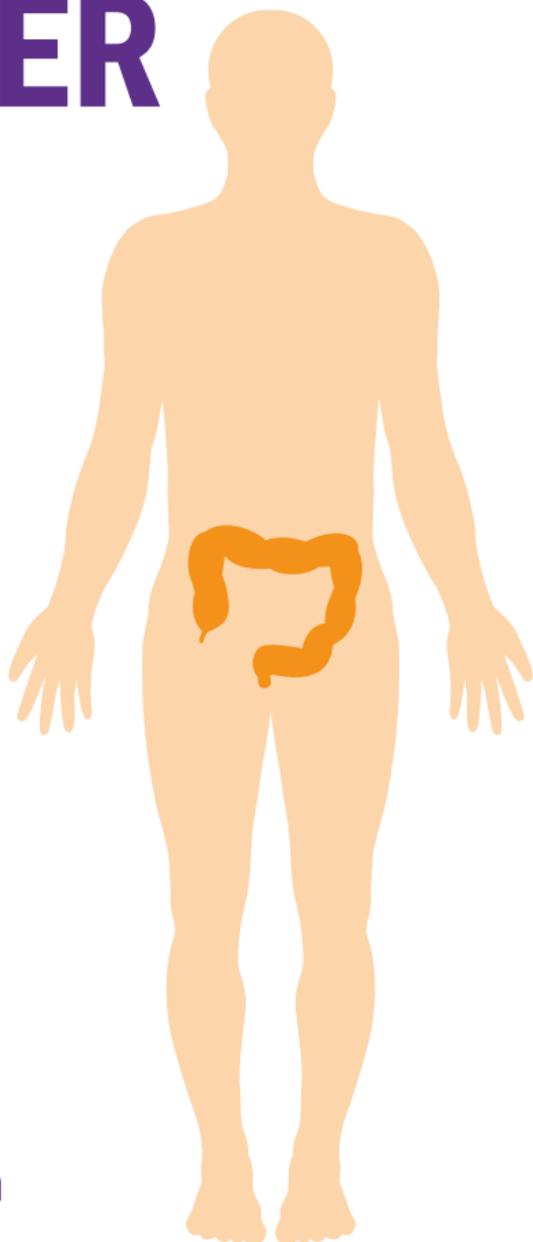




# REDUCING YOUR RISK OF BOWEL CANCER



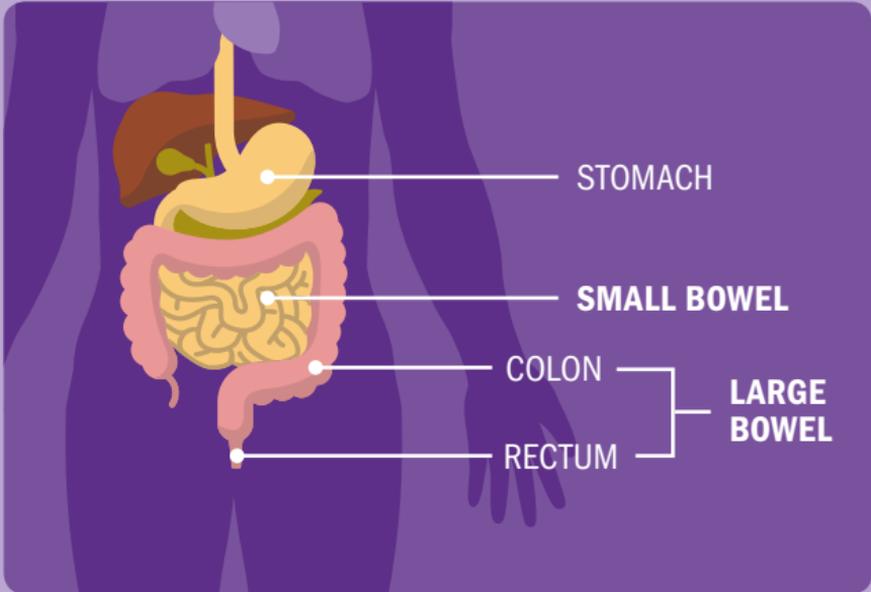
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**Bowel cancer – also known as colorectal cancer – is the fourth most common type of cancer in the UK. One in 14 men and one in 19 women develop the disease at some stage in their lifetime, and there are over 40,000 new cases diagnosed every year in the UK. But the evidence suggests almost half (about 47%) of cases could be prevented if we all ate a healthy diet, kept our weight healthy and were regularly physically active.**

## **What is the bowel?**

The bowel is part of our digestive system. It is made up of two parts: the small and large bowel. Nearly all bowel cancers are in the large bowel, which is made up of the colon and the rectum.

Most of the nutrients from the food we eat are absorbed in the small bowel. Food then passes into the colon where water and any remaining nutrients are absorbed, leaving behind solid waste products. These waste products move through the colon and the rectum before leaving the body.



**Bowel cancer starts when cells in the bowel lining are damaged and then grow uncontrollably, forming a tumour. Many different factors contribute to the development of bowel cancer.**

## **Who is most at risk?**

Bowel cancer is common in both men and women. Although more than 80 per cent of cases are diagnosed in people aged 60 and over, our lifestyles today can affect our future risk.

As with all cancers, the risk of developing bowel cancer varies from person to person and it isn't caused by one thing. There are lots of different factors that can increase or decrease our chances of developing the disease, many of which are linked to our way of life. This means that you can make changes to reduce your risk.

## **Risk factors**

Risk factors are things associated with an increased risk of bowel cancer. Some risk factors are beyond our control, such as:

- ▶ **Having a family history of bowel cancer**
- ▶ **Having a personal history of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease**

But there is also strong scientific evidence linking increased risk of bowel cancer with lifestyle factors that we can make choices about, such as:

- ▶ **Being overweight or obese**
- ▶ **Not eating enough fibre-containing foods**
- ▶ **Eating too much red meat, eg. beef, lamb and pork**
- ▶ **Eating processed meat, eg. bacon, ham and salami**
- ▶ **Not doing enough physical activity**
- ▶ **Drinking alcohol**
- ▶ **Smoking tobacco**

If any of these risk factors apply to you, it does not mean that you will develop bowel cancer – it just means that your risk may be higher than average. The important thing to remember is that even making small lifestyle changes can help to make bowel cancer less likely in your future.

## Reducing your risk

By following these simple steps, you can help to reduce your risk of bowel cancer.



### Be a healthy weight

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and being physically active can help you to keep your weight healthy. Research shows that being overweight or obese increases the risk of bowel cancer, and 10 other cancers.

**Check if you could benefit from losing some weight by using our BMI calculator:**

[www.wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator)



### Boost your fibre

Wholegrain varieties of rice, bread, pasta and breakfast cereals; pulses, such as beans, peas and lentils; vegetables and fruit are all good sources of fibre, which is important for keeping your digestive system healthy and can help you feel fuller on fewer calories.

There is strong scientific evidence that eating a diet rich in these foods can lower your bowel cancer risk.

**Aim to eat at least five portions of vegetables and fruit a day, and swap to wholegrain foods.**





## Limit red meat & avoid processed meat

Red meat, such as beef, pork and lamb, can form part of a healthy, balanced diet, but we don't need to eat it every day. There is strong scientific evidence that eating too much red meat can increase your risk of bowel cancer. That's why **we recommend eating no more than 500g (cooked weight, about 700–750g raw) of red meat a week.**

### How much can I have a week?



A healthy portion of red meat is about 80g (cooked, 120g raw) – this is about the size of a pack of cards – you can have a portion this size up to six times a week. Alternatively, you could have four medium-sized portions a week. For example:

- ▶ **Spaghetti Bolognese** made with minced beef = **140g** (cooked, about 200g raw)
- ▶ **Steak** = **145g** (cooked, about 210g raw)
- ▶ **Pork or lamb chop** = **75g** (cooked, about 110g raw)
- ▶ **Roast beef, pork or lamb** (three thin slices) = **90g** (cooked, about 130g raw)

It's best to opt for lean cuts and trim visible fat.

The research linking processed meat (like bacon, ham and salami) with bowel cancer is even stronger. It also increases the risk of stomach cancer and there is no nutritional need to eat it, so **we recommend avoiding processed meats as much as possible.**

**TOP TIP:** Swap red or processed meat for skinless poultry, such as chicken and turkey; fish (fresh, frozen or canned in spring water – it is best to limit smoked fish as it can be high in salt); or vegetarian alternatives such as tofu, Quorn and beans.



## Move more



Being physically active burns calories, which can help you avoid gaining weight. It also helps food to move through your digestive system more quickly.

**Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity every day** – that’s any activity that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe a bit deeper – and **spend less time sitting down**.

**TOP TIP:** Being physically active doesn’t mean you have to go to the gym – brisk walking, gardening, vacuuming, swimming and dancing count too.



## Think about what you drink

Drinking any amount of alcohol will increase your risk of cancer so, for cancer prevention, **it is best not to drink alcohol**. If you choose to, limit alcoholic drinks and follow national guidelines.

In the UK the recommendation is to drink no more than 14 units a week, spread over at least three days – this is roughly equal to seven drinks a week.

### One drink is:



**One small glass (125ml) of wine**



**One single measure of spirits**



**Half a pint of regular strength lager or cider**



And of course, choosing not to smoke (or giving up smoking) is an important way of reducing your cancer risk, including bowel cancer.

## Symptoms to look out for (based on NHS advice)

If you have had blood in your poo or looser poo for three weeks or more, speak to your doctor about it as soon as possible.

There's a good chance it's nothing to worry about, but it could be the early signs of bowel cancer, so it is important to get it checked out. Telling your doctor might save your life, or at the very least, it will stop you from worrying.

Other symptoms can include: pain or a lump in your tummy, feeling unusually tired, and unexplained weight loss.

## What about screening?

The majority of bowel cancer cases can be successfully treated if they are found early – that's why the UK has a bowel cancer screening programme. Call your local bowel screening helpline for more information:



England: **0800 707 6060**

Northern Ireland: **0800 015 2514**

Scotland: **0800 012 1833**

Wales: **0800 294 3370**

All men and women aged between 60 (50 in Scotland) and 74 should receive a free home testing kit every two years. In England and Scotland, people over 74 can request a kit. This quick and simple test is completely free and could save your life.

A one-off bowel scope screening is also being rolled out across England to 55-year olds, and is available in some parts of Scotland to those aged about 60.

If you are at a higher risk of bowel cancer (for example, if you have a strong family history of the disease) your doctor may recommend bowel cancer screening at an earlier age. Speak to your doctor for more advice if you are concerned about this.



## Finding out more

For more information on **reducing your risk of cancer**, as well as **practical advice** on choosing a balanced diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight, visit our website: **[www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org)** or call us on **0207 343 4205**.

For information about **symptoms, screening** and for **answers to frequently asked questions**, please visit **[www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer](http://www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer)** or speak to your doctor.

If you want more information on the **detection and treatment of bowel cancer (or other cancers)**, we recommend contacting **Macmillan Cancer Support**. Visit their website, **[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)** or call **0808 808 0000**.

# Cancer Prevention Recommendations



**1 Be a healthy weight**



**2 Move more**



**3 Avoid high-calorie foods and sugary drinks**



**4 Enjoy more grains, veg, fruit and beans**



**5 Limit red meat and avoid processed meat**



**6 For cancer prevention, don't drink alcohol**



**7 Eat less salt**



**8 For cancer prevention, don't rely on supplements**



**9 If you can, breastfeed your baby**



**10 Cancer survivors should follow our Recommendations**

*And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco*

To read our full Recommendations visit:

[www.wcrf-uk.org/10ways](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/10ways)



# About World Cancer Research Fund

We are the leading UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer. Our mission is to champion the latest and most authoritative scientific research from around the world on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity so that we can help people make informed lifestyle choices to reduce their cancer risk.

Cancer currently affects one in two people in the UK but about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations. That's around 80,000 cancer-free lives.

The cornerstone of our research programme is our Continuous Update Project (CUP). It's the world's largest source of scientific research on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity. The CUP reviews new research findings to ensure our advice is always up-to-date. Find out more: [www.wcrf-uk.org/our-research](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/our-research)

For tips and advice to reduce your cancer risk, or for more information about World Cancer Research Fund, please contact us on the details below.

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