

## What if I am younger than 50 or over 74 years?

Whilst bowel cancer is less common in people who are younger than 50, it can develop at any age. Men and women under the age of 50 who are concerned about bowel cancer are encouraged to see their GP to discuss risk factors, family history and symptoms.

Those aged 75 years or over are encouraged to see their GP to discuss screening options based on their individual circumstances.

If you are not currently eligible to receive a free kit through the NBCSP, kits can be purchased through a pharmacy.

### References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, *Cancer data in Australia 2019*. Cancer series no. 119. Cat.no CAN 123.Canberra: AIHW
2. South Australian Cancer Registry 2019, *Cancer in South Australia 2016 – with projections to 2019*. Adelaide: South Australian Department for Health and Ageing.
3. Cancer Council Australia 2018, *National Cancer Control Policy: Bowel cancer screening*. Available from: [https://wiki.cancer.org.au/policy/Bowel\\_cancer/Screening](https://wiki.cancer.org.au/policy/Bowel_cancer/Screening) [26 June 2019].

## About Cancer Council SA

Cancer Council SA is South Australia's leading, independent, non-government cancer control organisation. We are dedicated to helping South Australians reduce their cancer risk and receive the best cancer care.

### Mission

To lead, empower and mobilise the community to contribute to a cancer free future.



## Bowel cancer (Colorectal cancer)



For free\* and confidential information and support about cancer, Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 5.30 pm:

- call Cancer Council **13 11 20**
- chat online at [cancersa.org.au](https://cancersa.org.au)
- email [askanurse@cancersa.org.au](mailto:askanurse@cancersa.org.au)

Free\* interpreting service is available on **131 450**.

\*Cost of a local call

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Information and support

**13 11 20**  
[cancersa.org.au](https://cancersa.org.au)

Early  
detection  
of cancer

Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the second biggest cause of cancer-related death in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Each year, more than 1,000 South Australians are diagnosed with bowel cancer and more than 400 die from the disease.<sup>2</sup> However, around 90 per cent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated if found early.<sup>3</sup>

## What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is a cancerous growth that starts in the lining of the large bowel. Most bowel cancers develop from an abnormal growth, known as a polyp. Polyps are usually benign but can sometimes become cancerous after growing for a long time.

The earlier a bowel cancer is found, the better the chance of successfully treating it.

## Who is at risk of bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer can occur at any age, however the risk is greater if you are aged 50 or over.

Your risk of bowel cancer also increases if you:

- have a strong family history of bowel cancer
- have had serious inflammatory bowel disease (such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease) for more than eight years
- smoke
- have a poor diet—including low fibre intake, high consumption of red meat or processed meats, and alcohol consumption
- do not exercise regularly
- have a waistline of over 80 cm in women or 94 cm in men
- have a rare inherited genetic disorder such as Lynch syndrome or familial adenoma polyposis (FAP)

## Bowel cancer symptoms

Bowel cancer often develops without symptoms but it is important to see your GP if you notice any of the following:

- rectal bleeding or any sign of blood after a bowel motion
- a persistent change in bowel habits—e.g. loose or more frequent bowel motions, increased constipation, needing to go to the toilet more than usual
- the feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- abdominal pain
- unexplained weight loss, tiredness, weakness or breathlessness

Changes in bowel function are common and often do not indicate a serious problem. However, any amount of bleeding is not normal and you should see your GP for a check-up.

## Screening for bowel cancer

Bowel cancer screening involves testing people without any obvious symptoms of bowel cancer. You can screen for bowel cancer using a simple, at-home test called a Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT).

Screening with an FOBT is recommended every two years for men and women aged 50 or over. Screening is particularly important for bowel cancer, as it often has no symptoms in its early stages.

## Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)

An FOBT doesn't diagnose cancer. It looks for tiny traces of blood in the bowel motion (faeces)—which is usually not serious but may be a sign of polyps or early bowel cancer—and indicates that further testing is required. The test involves taking a tiny sample from two separate bowel motions, using the sampling sticks provided, and mailing the samples to a pathology laboratory for analysis.

## The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) sends free FOBT kits in the mail to eligible people aged 50-74 every two years. Cancer Council SA strongly urges eligible people to complete their free test when it arrives.

For more information about the NBCSP visit [cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel](http://cancerscreening.gov.au/bowel)

If you would like to know when your kit will arrive, or require a replacement kit, call the NBCSP information line on 1800 118 868. Eligible people aged 50-74 can receive up to two replacement kits if theirs becomes lost, expired or damaged.



Illustration of the Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) envelope as provided by the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.