

Maintaining a healthy bowel

There is increasing evidence that our diet and lifestyle affects the health of our bowel and therefore our chances of getting bowel cancer. Evidence suggests that 54 per cent of bowel cancers can be prevented with healthier lifestyle choices [Cancer Research UK, 2019].

Below are some simple steps that can be taken to help maintain a healthy bowel.

- Eat plenty of fibre. Fibre keeps everything moving through your bowel. Healthy choices include starting the day with a wholegrain cereal, wholegrain toast or porridge. Throughout the day include other high fibre foods such as fruit and vegetables, beans, lentils and wholegrain rice, bread and pasta.
- Government guidelines suggest we should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Keep hydrated. Aim for 6-8 glasses of water a day, that's around two litres. If having tea and coffee consider switching to decaffeinated as caffeine can be dehydrating.
- Limit the amount of red meat to 500g a week, that's four average portions and processed meat such as ham, bacon and sausages should be limited to occasional treats.
- Keep your alcohol intake to 14 units a week. Alcohol can damage cells making them more likely to become cancerous.
- If you smoke, give up. Smoking increases the likelihood of developing polyps which could turn into a cancer if not treated. You can get help at your GP surgery, pharmacy or NHS Stop Smoking service.
- Be physically active and maintain a healthy weight. 30 minutes of exercise 5 times a week is the minimum recommendation and could help you manage your weight too.
- Participate in the Bowel Cancer Screening Program. Attend for your Bowel Scope at age 55 and complete your 'poo' test every two years from age 60 to 74 or 'Opt In' if you are older. These tests allow for detection and treatment of polyps which can prevent a cancer in years to come.
- Know the signs of bowel cancer and see your GP - blood in your poo, persistent change in bowel habit, unexplained weight loss, tiredness, a pain or lump in your tummy.

References:

Cancer Research UK (2019) *International agency for research on cancer/ world cancer research fund classifications*. Available at: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/bowel-cancer/risk-factors>

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GOV.UK (2018) *The eat well guide*. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide