



# BowelScreen

An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Putóige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



## About bowel screening

## What is BowelScreen?

BowelScreen – The National Bowel Screening Programme offers free bowel screening to men and women aged 60 to 69 every two years.

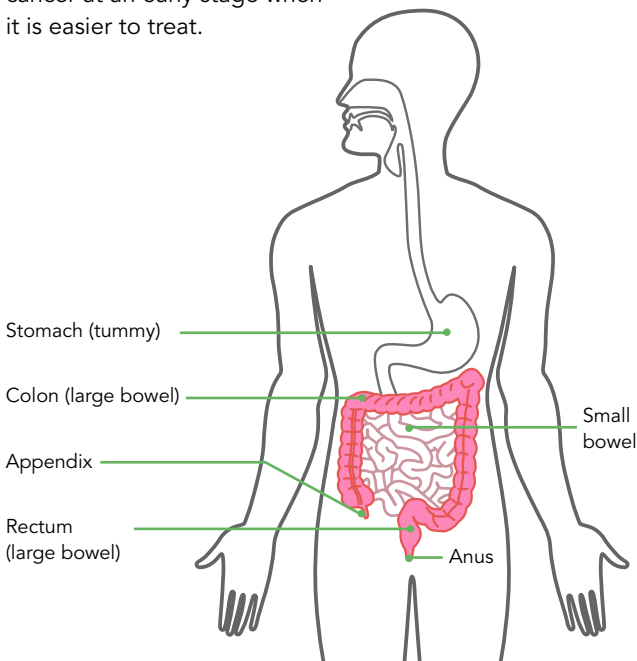
## What is bowel screening?

Bowel screening is a simple home test that looks for tiny amounts of blood in your bowel motion (also called a stool) which are not visible to the eye. Blood in the stool can be due to a number of causes or minor conditions. But it can also be an early warning sign that something might be wrong. The bowel screening test does not tell if you have bowel cancer but it might tell you that you need more tests.

## What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is also known as colon, rectal or colorectal cancer. It affects the lower part of the digestive system (gut). Bowel cancer is the second most common form of cancer among men and women in Ireland.

Screening aims to find bowel cancer at an early stage when it is easier to treat.



## Should I be screened for bowel cancer?

The risk of bowel cancer increases with age. All men and women aged 60 to 69 living in Ireland should be screened.

## Why screen for bowel cancer?

Bowel screening aims to find bowel cancer at an early stage in people who have no symptoms. If bowel cancer is found early, there is a much better chance of treating it successfully.

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

## What is the BowelScreen home test?

The BowelScreen home test is a faecal immunochemical test also known as the FIT test.

## How is the BowelScreen home test done?

You do the test in your own home. We will send you a letter inviting you to take part in the bowel screening programme. We will then send you a BowelScreen home test kit in the post and tell you how to do the test. The test takes a sample of your bowel motion (stool). It only takes one visit to the toilet. It is quick, easy and painless.

## What does giving my consent mean?

By giving your expressed consent you have agreed to take part in the BowelScreen programme and do the home test. You also allow BowelScreen to receive, hold and use your personal details and information about your BowelScreen clinical record. BowelScreen will share this information with your GP (family doctor), the colonoscopy clinic and the National Cancer Registry.

## When will I get the results?

Once you have sent back your test sample, you will get a letter with the results of your BowelScreen home test in four weeks. Most people will have a normal result.

## What do the results mean?

There are two types of result.

- 1. A normal result.** This means that blood was not found in your test sample. It is still important that you know the symptoms of bowel cancer and what to look for and go to your GP (family doctor) if you have any concerns. If you are still aged between 60 and 69, we will offer you another bowel screening test in two years.
- 2. A not normal result.** This means that blood was found in your test sample. It does not necessarily mean that you have bowel cancer but it does mean that you need to have another, more detailed, test called a colonoscopy.

## What is 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 polyps or signs of disease in the lining of your bowel. A small sample of the lining of your bowel may be taken to look at more closely. This is called a biopsy. If polyps are found, they are usually removed during the colonoscopy without causing you any pain. A colonoscopy is the best way to diagnose bowel cancer and other conditions. If bowel cancer is found at an early stage, it is easier to treat.

A colonoscopy is carried out in a screening colonoscopy unit in a hospital organised by BowelScreen. The hospital is obliged to levy a statutory charge for all (except medical card holders) day care procedures of €75.

## How can I reduce my risk of developing bowel cancer?


- Take part in the BowelScreen programme
- Be more physically active
- Eat a diet with plenty of dietary fibre such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrain bread, brown rice and cereals
- Reduce intake of processed and red meat
- Keep a healthy weight
- Limit the amount of alcohol you take

## What are some of the symptoms of bowel cancer?

The most common symptoms of bowel cancer are:

- a change in your bowel habits such as going to the toilet more often or diarrhoea that lasts for a number of weeks;
- bleeding from the back passage (also known as the rectum) for no obvious reason;
- pain in your stomach (tummy);
- a lump in your tummy;
- loss of weight when you're not trying to lose weight.

A number of conditions can cause these symptoms. But if you have one or more of these symptoms you should see your GP (family doctor).



## Is the bowel screening test reliable?

Like all screening tests, bowel screening is not 100 per cent reliable. The test looks only for blood in your stool and not all cancers or polyps bleed all the time. Changes can also happen between screening tests. This is why it is so important to have the screening test every two years and to see your GP (family doctor) if you have any concerns or symptoms at any time.

## Where did you get my details?

BowelScreen puts together a register (list) of men and women eligible for screening from details supplied by the Department of Social Protection and self-registration, in accordance with Health Provision of Information Act, 1997.

## Is the information you hold about me safe?

Under the Data Protection Act, we keep your personal details and health records safe and confidential at all times.

**Freephone 1800 45 45 55**

**[www.bowelscreen.ie](http://www.bowelscreen.ie)**