

This little test could help save your life.

The bowel screening test: What you need to know

- One sample
- Complete at home
- Results within two weeks



Do you know the benefits of the bowel screening test?

- 9 out of 10 people survive bowel cancer if it's found and treated early
- The test can find bowel cancer early, even if you do not have any symptoms
- You do the test in the privacy of your own home

The bowel screening test is quick and easy to use, with just one small sample to send.

Your bowel screening test

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in Scotland.

Your bowel screening test can find bowel cancer early when it can often be cured.

Half a million people in Scotland do their bowel screening test each year.

Why am I being sent this bowel screening test?

Everyone in Scotland aged 50 to 74 is sent a bowel screening test every two years. The test aims to pick up early signs of bowel cancer, before people have any symptoms. It can help spot cancers at an early stage, when treatment is more likely to be successful. Bowel screening can also pick up other changes in the bowel, such as pre-cancerous growths called polyps.

The test is for people from age 50 onwards because your risk of having bowel cancer is higher.

Can I take the test if I have other health conditions?

It's safe to take the bowel screening test if you have other health conditions, including piles (haemorrhoids).

It's also okay to take the test if you're on medication, including blood thinners, iron tablets or antibiotics.

Facts

- Around 4,000 people in Scotland get bowel cancer every year.
- You're 14 times more likely to survive bowel cancer if it's found early.

How do I take the test?

- Full picture instructions on how to take the bowel screening test are included on the back of your letter.
- Take your label from the front of your letter and stick it on the side of the tube marked with the +. Write the date you take the sample on the other side.
- Unscrew the lid of the tube to remove the stick. Dip the end of the stick into your poo sample, replace the stick in the tube and make sure you screw the lid of the tube back on.
- The test can be done in the privacy of your own home and returned using the pre-paid envelope provided.
- There's a useful step-by-step video guide to home bowel screening. Visit www.nhsinform.scot/bowelscreeningtest

“After I completed the first kit I kept thinking this could be a life saver, so I should just do it. It only takes a few minutes as well.”

(Ajay, 59)

What happens after I post my test?

We'll test your poo for hidden blood. Then we'll post your result to you within two weeks.

What are the possible results of bowel screening?

There are two possible results.

- **No further tests needed.** Most people get this result. It means that no blood, or only a very small amount of blood, was found in your sample. This result does not guarantee that you do not have bowel cancer, or that you will not develop it in the future. You will receive another test in two years' time. Changes can happen between one bowel screening and the next. You should talk to your GP if you notice any of the changes listed on page 6.
- **Further tests needed.** This result means the amount of blood found in your poo sample is above the screening limit. It does not mean you have bowel cancer but we'll need to do more to find out what is causing the bleeding.

What happens after I get my result?

Most people will not need any further investigation. If the amount of blood in your poo sample is above the screening limit, you will be referred to your Health Board where they can determine the best examination for you.

For most people, this will be a colonoscopy. If you're invited for a colonoscopy, you'll receive information about the benefits and risks of the procedure before your appointment.

This test picks up most bowel cancers, it does not find all bowel cancers. This is because the test looks for blood, and not all cancers bleed all the time. We'll send you another test every two years until you turn 75. After that, you can ask for a test by contacting the Scottish Bowel Screening Centre (see page 9).

For more information about what your bowel screening test result means, visit www.nhsinform.scot/bowelscreening

"I was going to ignore it but decided it would be better for me to just do it. I was so happy I did for the peace of mind it gave me."

(James, 63)

Does blood in my poo sample mean I definitely have bowel cancer?

No.

For every 500 people who take the test, only 10 will need to go for further investigation. **Of these 10, only one will have bowel cancer.**

If the amount of blood we find in your poo sample is above the normal screening limit, we'll need to find out what's causing it. We usually do this by using a colonoscopy. We'll write to tell you about this. The colonoscopy involves passing a thin, flexible tube into your bowel so it can be examined. The colonoscopy will be done in hospital. It's usually an outpatient appointment, so you should not need to stay in hospital for more than a few hours. Before coming to the hospital you'll need to empty your bowel. You'll be given clear instructions about how to do this before your appointment. If you're invited for a colonoscopy, you'll receive information about the benefits and risks of the procedure before your appointment.

9 out of 10 people will survive if bowel cancer is found and treated early.

Does the test find all bowel cancer?

No. The test will pick up most cases of bowel cancer but cannot find them all. The test looks for hidden blood in your poo and not all cancers bleed. This is why as well as doing the test every time you're invited, it's also important to look out for symptoms of bowel cancer.

Signs and symptoms of bowel cancer include:

- repeated bleeding from your bottom or blood in your poo
- a recent change in your bowel habit (how often you go to the toilet) that continues for more than four weeks without going back to normal
- watery poo on its own or with constipation (constipation on its own is less likely to be serious)
- severe pain in your tummy that will not go away, especially after eating, combined with losing weight without trying
- you feel tired all the time.

Speak to your GP practice if ...

you notice any of the changes above, or anything else that is not normal for you.

Can I do anything to reduce my risk of bowel cancer?

Yes.

As well as doing your bowel screening test, you can try to:

- eat a healthy diet:
 - include lots of wholegrains, beans, pulses, fruit and vegetables
 - limit red meat, processed foods and those high in sugar or fat (such as sugary drinks)
- be more active
- maintain a healthy weight
- drink less alcohol – not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention – visit **www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk** for more information
- stop smoking – if you do smoke, call **Quit Your Way** free on **0800 84 84 84** or visit **www.quityourway.scot** to help you quit
- tell your GP if you've any worries about your bowel habits.

You can find more information about healthy living by visiting **www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living**

What happens to my details?

NHS Scotland will keep your personal screening information, including test results, in an NHS Scotland approved secure environment. All NHS staff must keep your personal information confidential, which means it is only shared with other staff involved in your care.

We regularly review our screening service to make sure we provide the best service possible. We use information from screening to identify areas for improvement and make sure the service meets agreed standards. Only authorised staff and appropriate healthcare professionals have access to this information.

We may use the information for research, education and training. If this happens we will remove your personal details.

You have rights in relation to the access and the use of your personal health information. For more information about your rights or how the NHS uses your personal information visit:

www.nhsinform.scot/confidentiality and
www.nhsinform.scot/data-protection

Opting out of the bowel screening programme

It's your choice whether or not you are screened. If you decide that you do not want to be screened and do not want any more invitations, you can opt out. This means you will not get invited for bowel screening in the future.

Opting out is something to think through carefully. It could mean that if you have the condition being screened for in the future, early signs might be missed. You may want to discuss any concerns with your GP or someone from the Scottish Bowel Screening Centre (see page 9).

Where can I find more information or ask questions about the test?

The advisers at the Scottish Bowel Screening Centre are happy to answer any questions you have and they'll respect your privacy.

- Phone the free confidential helpline on **0800 0121 833**
(textphone **18001 0800 0121 833**)
- Email: TAY.scottishbowelscreening@nhs.scot
- You can also go online and visit:
www.nhsinform.scot/bowelscreening

“It was actually really easy. I thought it would be hard...I’m also very glad I had a good result.”
(Rita, 59)

Translations Easy read BSL Audio Large print Braille

For more information, or for translations and other formats:

- Website: **www.nhsinform.scot/bowelscreening**
- Email: **p hs.otherformats@p hs.scot**
- Phone: **0131 314 5300**

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1037 5/2023