

Bowel cancer

What is bowel cancer?

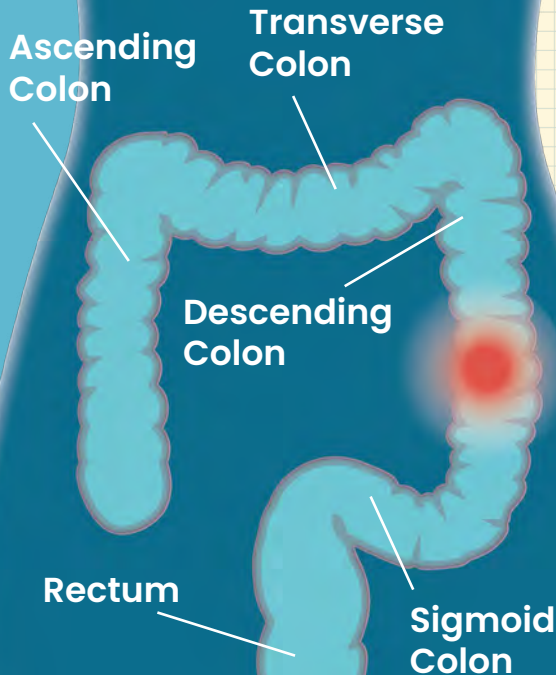


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Bowel cancer is cancer that's found anywhere in the **large bowel**, which includes the **colon and rectum** ⁽¹⁾.

It is sometimes referred to as **colorectal cancer**.



Prostate

Breast

Lung

Bowel

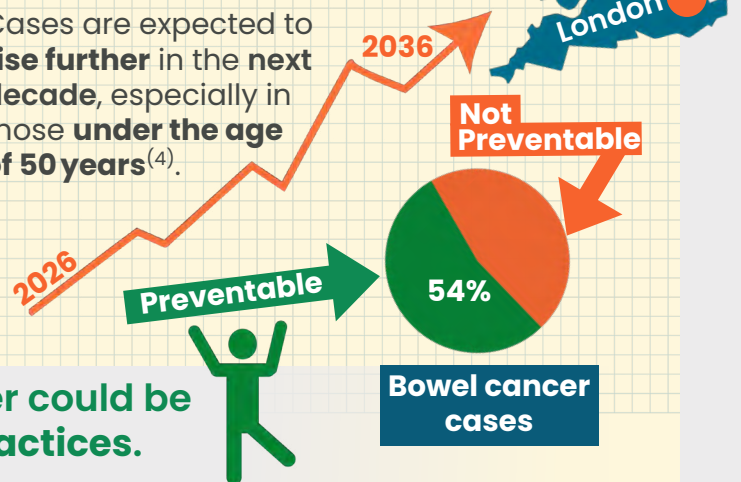
Most common cancers

Bowel cancer is the **fourth most common** cancer diagnosed in the UK ⁽²⁾.

Every year more than **46,000** people are diagnosed with this serious and **life-changing condition** ⁽³⁾.

This is equivalent to the number of people who **run** the London Marathon.

Cases are expected to **rise further** in the next decade, especially in those **under the age of 50 years** ⁽⁴⁾.



Over half of all cases of bowel cancer could be prevented with healthier lifestyle practices.

Bowel cancer **risk** is influenced by **several lifestyle factors**.

The main **preventable** causes are ⁽³⁾:

Eating too much red and processed meat



Smoking



Ionising radiation



Eating too little fibre

Too little physical activity



Overweight and obesity



Drinking alcohol



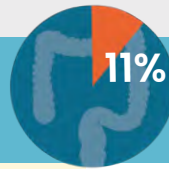
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1 Maintain a healthy body weight



11% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by overweight and obesity.



Being **overweight** or **obese** **increases the risk** of developing bowel cancer⁽⁵⁾.

The **risk** is **48% higher** for men who are **obese**, compared to men who are a **healthy weight**⁽⁶⁾.

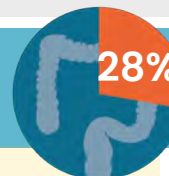
Having a **healthy diet** and **active lifestyle** can support **reaching** and maintaining a **healthy weight**. People following a **plant-based diet** tend to have a **lower body mass index**, and are **less likely to gain weight over time**^(7, 8, 9).

If you are struggling to get daily physical exercise, **aim to start gently**. Even a **brisk 30 minute** walk each day can be beneficial.



The “**NHS Couch to 5k**” App has been used successfully by thousands of people and will gradually guide you to a **more active lifestyle**.

2 Eat plenty of fibre



28% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by eating too little fibre.

Eating plenty of fibre daily can **reduce your risk** of bowel cancer⁽¹⁰⁾.

Every **10g increase** in whole grain fibre consumed **daily** is associated with a **10% reduction** in colon cancer⁽¹¹⁾.

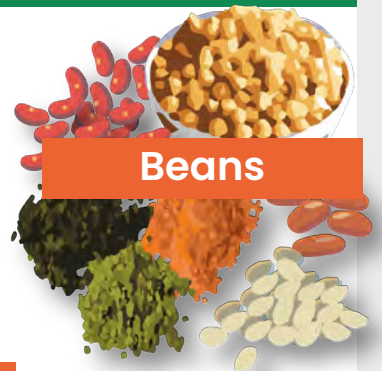
With modern eating habits our diets can easily fail to provide enough dietary fibre, especially if consuming large amounts of animal-based and highly processed foods.

Fibre intake can be increased by making sure that we eat plenty of:

Vegetables



Beans



Fruits



Brown rice



Whole grain pasta



Whole grain breads



Unprocessed cereals



Every day



Bowel cancer

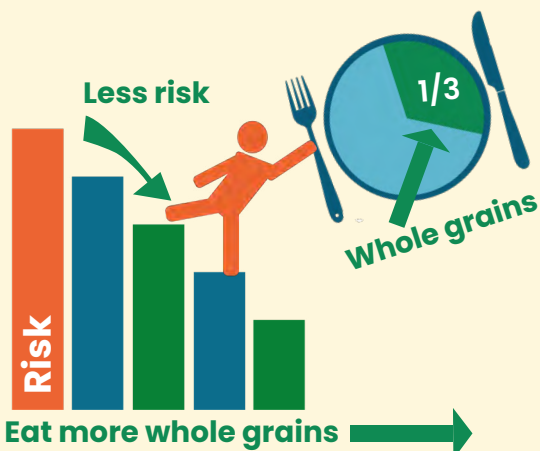


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Fibre continued:

The NHS Eatwell Guide suggests that healthy **whole grains** should form more than **one-third** of the foods that we eat each day and it's estimated that colorectal cancer **risk decreases by 17%** for each 90g/day increase of whole grains⁽¹²⁾.



If you're **not used to eating much fibre**, make the **increase gradually** to allow your digestive system to adjust.

Aim to consume a **minimum of 30g of fibre each day**.

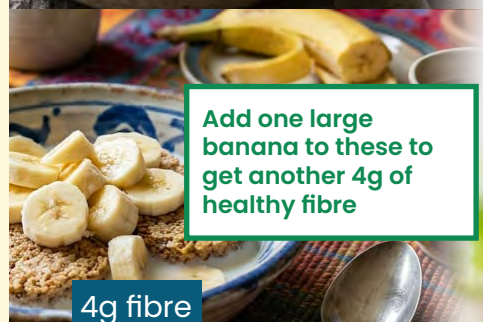
A **fibre-rich breakfast** is a great start to the day:



7g fibre

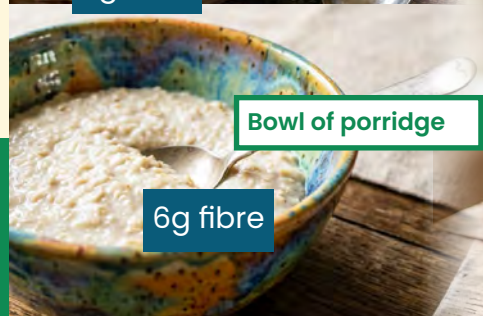


Add 1tbsp chia seeds for an extra 4g fibre



4g fibre

Breakfast smoothie with 1/2 cup frozen raspberries, 1 banana, 30g oats, 250ml soya milk



6g fibre



3 Eat your beans and greens



A higher intake of **B vitamins** has been associated with a **reduced risk** of bowel cancer^(13, 14, 15).



It's good news for individuals who like coffee!

The World Cancer Research Fund recommends including **coffee** as part of a **healthy diet** for bowel cancer prevention⁽¹⁷⁾.

You can ensure that you are getting these benefits by eating your "**beans and greens**"; include plenty of **leafy green vegetables** and **beans** as part of your daily menu. Individuals consuming a plant-based diet should take a **regular B12 supplement**.

In patients who have had colon polyps removed, **bean consumption** may also **reduce the risk** of new polyps forming over time⁽¹⁶⁾.



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Steps to take to reduce the risk of bowel cancer



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4

Get enough calcium

Getting enough calcium, regardless of the source, is associated with a **reduced risk** of bowel cancer⁽¹⁸⁾.



Increasing calcium intake to meet the recommended daily intake (700mg a day for adults) may help to **reduce the risk** of developing bowel cancer.

Good plant-based sources of calcium include:



TOFU

Calcium-set tofu



Fortified plant-based dairy alternatives

Tahini



Almond butter



Other nuts and seeds

Green leafy veg such as kale, broccoli, bok choy, watercress and rocket

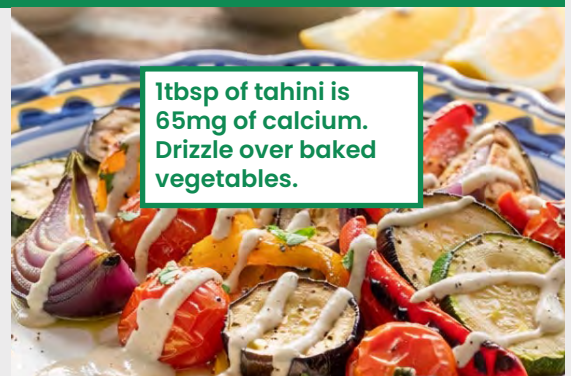
Tips to increase calcium intake:



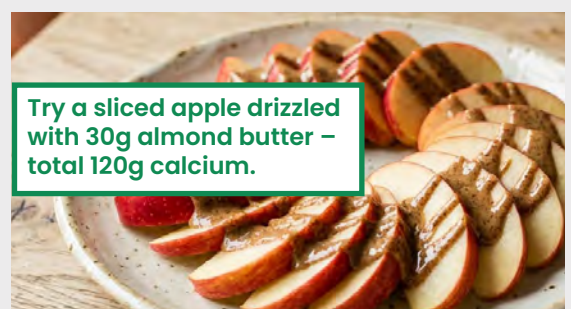
Always ensure plant-based dairy alternatives are fortified, aim for a minimum 400mls daily.



200mls soya drink in porridge or on fortified breakfast cereal plus 80g calcium set-tofu will provide approximately 520-650mg calcium.



1tbsp of tahini is 65mg of calcium. Drizzle over baked vegetables.



Try a sliced apple drizzled with 30g almond butter – total 120g calcium.

While research shows that taking calcium supplements can help reduce bowel cancer risk, it is **not recommended** to rely on supplements for cancer prevention.

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Avoid red meat and processed meat

13%

Cancer Research UK estimates that 13% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by eating processed meats alone^(3,4)

Eating just **50 grams** of **processed meat daily** (equivalent to one sausage) **increases your risk** of bowel cancer by about **18%**.



Eating **100g red meat every day** (equivalent to less than a burger a day) **increases your risk** of bowel cancer by about **17%**⁽¹⁹⁾.



Easy ways to cut down on red and processed meat include:

Replace mince from cows with **Quorn** or **soya mince**, **lentils**, or **beans** in recipes such as **bolognaise** and **chilli con carne**



Replace



Soya mince pasta



Lentil bolognaise

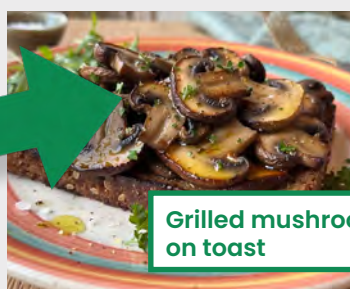


Kidney bean and lentil chilli con carne

Swap sausages and bacon for **plant-based alternatives** for **breakfast**



Swap



Grilled mushrooms on toast



Beans on toast



Scrambled tofu roll

Use **pulses** like **chickpeas** or **lentils** in **curries**, **stews**, and **salads**



Mixed bean curry



Chickpea stew



Lentil salad

Reduce portion sizes of **red meat** and **bulk out** dishes with **vegetables**, **beans**, or **whole grains**

A plant-based diet that **excludes** or **minimises animal-based products** is associated with a **21-24% risk reduction** of colorectal cancer^(20, 21).

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Steps to take to reduce the risk of bowel cancer

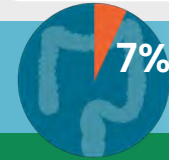


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6 Don't smoke

7% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by smoking⁽³⁾.



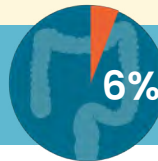
Large medical studies show that **smokers** have an **14–25% increased risk** of developing colon cancer^(22, 23).

This is due to the **multiple cancer-causing chemicals** found in **cigarette smoke**. The **longer** you smoke, the **larger** the risk.

It is never too late to benefit from quitting cigarettes.

You can learn more about getting help to **quit** by speaking to your **GP or pharmacist**. You can get free help to stop smoking at www.nhs.uk/Livewell

7 Avoid alcohol



In the UK, about **6%** of colon cancer cases are caused by **alcohol consumption**⁽³⁾.



When it comes to cancer prevention, there is **no safe limit for alcohol**. You can learn more about **keeping your alcohol use** to a sensible minimum at www.nhs.uk/Livewell.

8 Bowel cancer screening programme



Most countries offer **screening tests** to healthy individuals to look for **signs of pre-cancerous bowel polyps**. If you live in the UK there is **one bowel cancer screening programme** that you should take part in.

The Bowel Cancer Screening Programme (BCSP)

The NHS BCSP aims to **detect bowel cancer at an early stage** in people with **no symptoms**. It can also **detect and remove pre-cancerous polyps**, therefore helping to **reduce the risk** of cancer developing in the future. The BCSP offers screening **every two years** to all men and women **aged 50–74**.

When you enter this age group you will automatically be invited by letter to **send in a stool sample**. The sample is **tested** for any **signs** that you may already have a polyp or bowel cancer. **If the stool test is positive you will be offered a colonoscopy**⁽²⁴⁾.

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Review date: 08.2029

Created: 17.08.26

Version no: FS-Bowel Cancer-1