

## 5 Don't smoke (and if you do smoke, quit now)



Everyone knows that smoking causes cancer and this is just as true for cancer of the colon. Large medical studies show that smokers have an 18-25% increased risk of developing colon cancer.<sup>(12)</sup> 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](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell)

## 6 Keep alcohol to a minimum



Cancer Research UK have estimated that about 6% of colon cancer cases are caused by alcohol consumption.<sup>(13)</sup> When it comes to cancer prevention, there is no safe limit for alcohol. The UK Chief Medical Officer advises that your maximum weekly total alcohol consumption should not exceed 14 units (the equivalent of six small 175mls glasses of wine or six pints of 4% abv. lager). You can learn more about keeping your alcohol use to a sensible minimum at [www.nhs.uk/Livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell)

If you like coffee, there is some good news. The US Diet and Health Study (which followed 489,706 men and women for over 10.5 years) found that drinking four cups coffee per day was associated with a 15-26% lower risk of colon cancer, when compared to people who did not drink coffee at all.<sup>(14)</sup>

## 7 NHS Bowel Screening Programmes

Most countries offer screening tests to healthy individuals to look for signs of pre-cancerous bowel polyps. If you live in the United Kingdom there are two programmes that you should take part in.

### The Bowel Scope Screening Programme (BSSP)

The BSSP is a new test to help to prevent bowel cancer. A thin, flexible tube with a camera at the end is used to look inside your bowel. This can find and remove small growths, called polyps. Polyps do not usually cause symptoms but some might turn into bowel cancer if they are not removed. For every 300 people screened, it stops two from getting bowel cancer and prevents one death from bowel cancer. Bowel Scope is offered to men and women shortly after their 55<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>(15)</sup>

### 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. Regular bowel cancer screening has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from bowel cancer by 16%.<sup>(16)</sup>

The BCSP offers screening every two years to all men and women aged 60-74. When you enter this age group you will automatically be invited by letter to send in a stool sample every two years. 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.

### References

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- 3 **Abdominal fat:** *Eur J Cancer Prev.* 2012 Nov;21(6):523-31
- 4 **Dietary fibre:** *BMJ* 2011;343:d6617
- 5 **The Eatwell Guide:** *Public Health England* 2016
- 6 **Folate:** *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 13:511, 2004
- 7 **Vitamin B6:** *Biochim Biophys Acta* 1647:127, 2003
- 8 **B vitamins:** *Am J Clin Nutr* 97:332, 2013
- 9 **Beans:** *J Nutr.* 2006 Jul;136(7):1896-903
- 10 **WHO Statistics:** [www.who.int/.../cancer-red-meat/en/](http://www.who.int/.../cancer-red-meat/en/)
- 11 **Diet & Lifestyle:** [www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer](http://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer)
- 12 **Smoking:** *JAMA* 17;300(23):2765-78, 2008
- 13 **Alcohol:** *Clin Exp Res* 39:1280, 2015
- 14 **Coffee and tea:** *Am J Clin Nutr* 96:374, 2012
- 15 **NHS Bowel Screening:** *Public Health England* 2013
- 16 **Screening:** *Cochrane Systematic Reviews* 2006

# 7 positive actions to reduce your risk of colon cancer

*“In the UK, eating red and processed meat causes around 9,000 cases of colon cancer every year”*

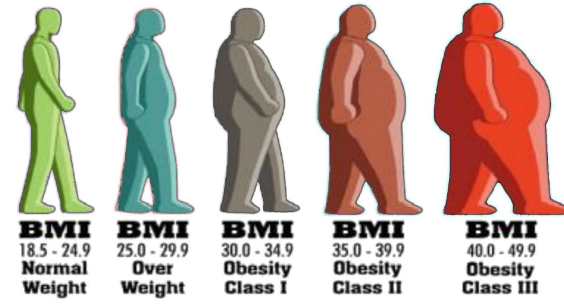
Source: Cancer Research UK

- 1 **Maintain a healthy body weight**
- 2 **Eat plenty of fibre**
- 3 **Eat your beans and greens**
- 4 **Avoid red meat and processed meat**
- 5 **Don't smoke**
- 6 **Limit alcohol**
- 7 **Bowel cancer screening programme**

Colon cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer diagnosed in the UK. Every year more than 41,000 people are diagnosed with this serious and life-changing condition<sup>(1)</sup>. Cancer Research UK estimate that **more than half of all cases of colon cancer can be prevented by a healthy diet and lifestyle.**



# 1 Maintain a healthy body weight



Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing colon cancer. The risk is 48% higher for men who are obese (body mass index >30) compared to men who are a healthy weight <sup>(2)</sup>. A larger waist measurement is associated with a greater risk of colon cancer <sup>(3)</sup>.

The keys to reaching and maintaining a healthy body weight are a healthy diet and physical activity. Eating a whole food, plant-based diet significantly reduces the risk of being overweight or obese.

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.



[www.nhs.uk/Livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell)



# 2 Eat plenty of fibre (more than 30g per day)

With modern eating habits our diets can easily fail to provide enough dietary fibre (also called "roughage"). We can increase our fibre intake by making sure that we eat plenty of vegetables, beans, whole grain breads, whole wheat pasta, brown rice and unprocessed cereals every day. The NHS Eatwell Guide suggests that healthy whole grains should form more than one-third of the foods that we eat each day. For every 10g of whole grain fibre you consume daily, you will reduce your risk of colon cancer by 10% <sup>(4)</sup>.

A good fibre-rich breakfast is a great start to your day. You can get 7.5g of fibre from a bowl of Branflakes breakfast cereal or 4.5g from two Shredded Wheats. One large banana adds another 4g of healthy fibre. You should aim to consume a minimum of 30g of fibre each day <sup>(5)</sup>.

Make the increase gradually to allow your digestive system to adjust.

# 3 Eat your beans and greens

Having a high consumption of foods which are rich in B vitamins has been associated with a 20% reduction in colon cancer risk <sup>(8)</sup>. In patients who have had colon polyps removed, bean consumption may significantly reduce the risk of new polyps forming over time.

*In the US National Cancer Institute's Polyp Prevention Trial, patients who had had colon polyps removed were placed on a healthy diet and followed for three years. The study found that participants who increased their bean consumption by 70g a day (less than a quarter of a can of beans a day) reduced their risk of developing more polyps by up to 65% <sup>(9)</sup>.*

You can ensure that you are getting these benefits by eating your "beans and greens"; include plenty of leafy green vegetable and beans as part of your daily menu.

# 4 Avoid red meat and processed meat

Red meat (*beef, pork, lamb, venison etc.*) and processed meat (*bacon, sausages, meat pies, cured hams etc.*) have been strongly linked to an increased risk of colon cancer.



Cancer Research UK estimates that 21% of colon cancer cases in the UK are caused by eating red and processed meats alone. <sup>(1)</sup> That adds up to more than 44,000 new cases of colon cancer every five years!

Eating just 50 gram of processed meat daily (less than 2oz, or the equivalent of one sausage) per day increases your risk of colon cancer by about 18%.

Eating red meat every day increases your risk of colon cancer by about 17% for every 100g (3.5oz) consumed <sup>(10)</sup>.

In 2018, the World Cancer Research Fund <sup>(11)</sup> examined risk factors for colon cancer and gave the following advice:

***“If you eat red meat, cutting down can help protect against bowel cancer”.***

Their verdict on bacon, sausages and cold cuts was even clearer:

***“Consume very little, if any, processed meat”***

