Screening for bowel cancer

England, Australia and many other countries have well-established screening programmes for bowel cancer.

Currently New Zealand does not have a fully implemented national bowel cancer screening programme – even though we are world leaders in rates of bowel cancer. A pilot programme began in 2012 in the Waitemata DHB region for people aged 50–74 years to inform development of a possible national bowel cancer screening programme.

Bowel Cancer New Zealand has been calling for the introduction of a national bowel cancer screening programme since 2010. International studies indicate that a national programme will prevent hundreds of New Zealanders from dying of bowel cancer each year. If you are invited to take part in a screening programme, we urge you to do so.

How it works

Screening helps identify bowel cancer and pre-cancerous growths early, before symptoms may be showing and when these growths and cancers are most curable.

There are several possible screening tests available. The most widely used is a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT). FIT can detect small amounts of blood in your bowel motions. The FIT looks for blood – not for bowel cancer itself. It is a simple, painless test that you do at home and then send away for analysis. Results are sent back to your GP who will discuss these with you. Visit our website for more information.

It is important to know that not all people with bowel cancer can be identified by screening. Therefore, even if you participate in screening, if you develop any symptoms we recommend that you see your GP immediately to discuss these.

Bowel cancer is detectable, treatable and beatable.

About us

Bowel Cancer New Zealand is a national patient-led charity aiming to decrease the impact of bowel cancer on the New Zealand community through awareness, education, support, research and promotion of access to appropriate screening and treatments.

Through our work we aim to help save lives from this common form of cancer, the second biggest cancer killer in New Zealand.

Support Bowel Cancer New Zealand by making a donation on our website www.beatbowelcancer.org.nz

email: info@beatbowelcancer.org.nz
post: PO Box 301517
Albany 0752
Auckland

Donate Volunteer

Statistics on incidence of bowel cancer based on Ministry of Health statistics 2014

Learn how to spot New Zealand’s most common cancer.
When to visit your GP
If you are experiencing any of the symptoms described in this leaflet you should make an appointment to see your GP.

• Don’t be embarrassed or scared. Your GP is used to discussing all sorts conditions every day and will have heard it all before.
• It is better to visit your GP early and be reassured and/or treated than to hope the symptoms will disappear or get better without treatment.

A visit to your GP could save your life.

Questions your GP may ask you
1. Has the frequency with which you go to the toilet to pass or try to pass motions increased; or have your motions become persistently looser over a few weeks, without going back to normal?
   This is the single most important clue. All people (regardless of their age) with this symptom persisting for a few weeks should be referred for hospital investigation.

2. If you haven’t had a change in bowel habit, but you do have bleeding from the bottom, have you got any other symptoms such as straining, lumps, soreness, pain or itchiness?
   If you do have these symptoms it is highly likely that you have piles. If you only have bleeding and no piles or other perianal symptoms (as your GP may describe it) you should be considered for further investigation.

3. How long have you been experiencing your symptoms?
   Many symptoms are due to common conditions and are not bowel cancer. However it is important to explain to your GP as precisely as possible when symptoms started, particularly if they are recent or persistent to ensure correct diagnosis.

4. Can I give you a rectal examination?
   Again your GP should offer people with bleeding a rectal examination (a painless, internal check with a gloved finger) in order to feel for any lumps or masses, along with a blood test to check for anaemia – both are possible symptoms of bowel cancer.

5. Does bowel cancer run in your family?
   Your GP should ask you this as a matter of course, but remember to mention any family history of bowel cancer during your appointment and to ask about screening options.