

## Staying well

### To help reduce your risk of bowel cancer:

- eat a healthy diet, including plenty of vegetables and fruit and only small amounts of red and processed meats
- keep a healthy body weight
- exercise regularly
- limit alcohol
- don't smoke
- screen every two years from age 50 to 74.

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[www.cancervic.org.au/dixon-patten](http://www.cancervic.org.au/dixon-patten)

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**Most can be  
prevented**

## What is bowel cancer?

**Bowel cancer (also known as colorectal cancer) is the second biggest cancer killer in Australia.**

Bowel cancer develops from growths on the bowel wall called polyps. These growths are usually harmless but may become cancerous over time. If removed, the risk of bowel cancer is reduced.

Even if you feel well, regular screening is important because bowel cancer can develop without symptoms. If bowel cancer is found early, 90% can be successfully treated.

## Who is at higher risk?

**Bowel cancer can occur at any age, but the risk is greater for men and women over the age of 50. Other factors can also increase your risk:**

- **lifestyle factors:** being overweight, doing little physical activity, a diet high in fat or processed and red meats, drinking alcohol or smoking
- **some bowel diseases:** including ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease
- **strong family history of bowel cancer.**

If you're concerned about your risk, see your doctor.

## What are the symptoms?

**Bowel cancer often develops without symptoms, but it is important to see your doctor if you notice any of the following:**

- any sign of blood after a poo
- change in your poo that won't go away e.g. loose or more frequent, increased constipation, needing to go to the toilet more than usual
- the feeling that your bowel is not empty after going to the toilet
- stomach pain
- unexplained weight loss, tiredness, weakness or breathlessness.

## Knowing you're well

**If you're aged 50–74, Cancer Council Victoria recommends doing a simple at-home test called a faecal occult blood test (FOBT) every two years.**

This test looks for traces of blood in the poo which are invisible and could be a sign of bowel cancer.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program sends a free test kit to some men and women aged 50–74.

Call the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program on 1800 118 868 to see if you're eligible for a free kit.

If you are not eligible through the national program you can speak with your doctor or pharmacist about how to obtain a test kit.

