

# Finding and preventing bowel cancer

**Bowel cancer is also known as colorectal cancer. It is the second biggest cancer killer in Australia. More than 3,600 Victorian men and women get it each year, and more than 1,350 die from it.**

**Over 90% of bowel cancers can be cured if found early.**

**We recommend men and women aged 50 and older, do a bowel cancer screening test every two years. Screening is important because you may not see or feel bowel cancer symptoms.**

**What does bowel screening involve?** Screening for bowel cancer involves doing a simple test at home. This is called a **faecal occult blood test (FOBT)**. It tests for blood in the faeces that could be a sign of bowel cancer. You may not be able to see this blood yourself.

The test involves:

- using the sticks or brushes provided to take a tiny sample from the faeces after two separate visits to the toilet
- sealing these in an airtight container
- mailing them to a pathology lab for testing.

In the kit, you will find the instructions and equipment you need.

## **What does a 'positive' test result mean?**

This means blood has been found in either of the two samples. This does not mean you have cancer.

In most cases, a positive result will be due to other conditions, such as:

- polyps, which are growths in the bowel
- haemorrhoids, which are swollen veins in the rectum or anus.

If your test is positive, you will get a letter asking you to speak to your doctor about a follow-up test, usually a colonoscopy. This will help to work out why there was blood in your faeces.

## **Where can I get a bowel test?**

Thanks to the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, those turning 50, 55 or 65 will get a free bowel screening test (FOBT) in the mail.

If you are 50 or over and have not received a test ask your doctor, pharmacist or health worker about getting an FOBT.

## **Bowel cancer warning signs**

Bowel cancer often happens without symptoms you can see or feel.

However, see your doctor if you have any of the following:

- blood after a bowel motion
- a change in bowel habits that you cannot explain, or that happens over a longer period, such as looser or more frequent bowel motions, or severe constipation
- unexplained tiredness
- pain in the lower stomach
- a feeling of fullness that does not go away.

### Who is at risk of bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in people aged 50 and over.

Some people have a higher risk because of:

- a strong family history of bowel cancer
- having had ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease.

If you are at a higher risk, talk to your doctor about your options.

### How can I lower my risk?

You can lower your risk of bowel cancer by having a healthy lifestyle.

We recommend:

- doing an FOBT every two years from the age of 50
- having a healthy body weight
- eating a healthy diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables
- doing 30 minutes of vigorous exercise, or an hour of moderate exercise most days
- limiting alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day, or avoiding it altogether
- not smoking.

### Multilingual Cancer Information Line

To talk confidentially with a cancer nurse in your preferred language, with the help of an interpreter, follow these steps:

1. Call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
2. Say the language you need.
3. Wait on the line for an interpreter (may take up to 3 minutes).
4. Ask the interpreter to contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.
5. You will be connected to the interpreter and a cancer nurse.

Visit [www.cancervic.org.au/multilingual](http://www.cancervic.org.au/multilingual) for more cancer information in your language, or for this fact sheet in other languages.

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