

BOWEL CANCER - YOUR A - Z GUIDE

April is bowel cancer awareness month. In the Republic of Ireland, bowel is the second most common cancer in both men and women and, importantly, it is the second leading cause of cancer death in men and third in women. Approximately 2500 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer in Ireland every year. 1 in 8 of these diagnoses is given to someone less than 50 years of age. Therefore it must be a priority for everyone, no matter what age to be aware of the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer. Early detection of bowel cancer improves outcomes. Strategies to detect bowel cancer before it has spread are essential.

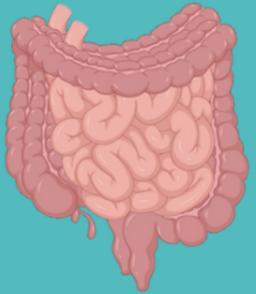
There are a number of research projects in Systems Biology Ireland tackling bowel cancer.

A

April is bowel cancer awareness month. During this month various organisations such as the Irish Cancer Society and the Marie Keating Foundation run campaigns to raise awareness of the condition. Although April is good time to draw attention to bowel cancer we all need to remain aware of symptoms year long.

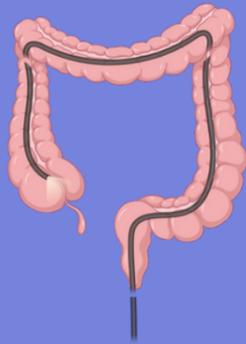
B

Bowel is the part of the food pipe that runs from the stomach to the back passage. Made of the colon (large bowel) and the rectum. Cancer of the bowel is also called colorectal cancer.



C

Colonoscopy is a medical procedure where a camera mounted on a flexible tube is passed through the back passage to examine the bowel. Biopsies of the bowel can be taken to assess if any cancer cells are present. It is not a painful procedure and medication is given so you will not remember the procedure.



D

Diarrhoea and other changes in bowel habit such as constipation should never be ignored. Any changes in bowel habit that are not resolving should be discussed with a medical professional.



E

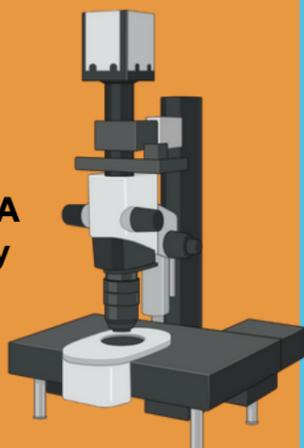
Early onset colorectal cancer is diagnosed those under 50 years of age. Rates of early onset cancer have increased dramatically worldwide by more than 100 per cent in the last three decades.

F

Familial inherited cancer syndromes have an incidence rate of less than 5% in the general population and are an important cause of CRC. The incidence is higher in younger patients, with approximately 20% of those under 50 who are diagnosed with colorectal cancer being affected by inherited cancer syndromes.

G

Grade of cancer is the term used to describe how the cancer cells behave. A low grade cancer may grow more slowly and is less likely to spread than a high grade cancer.



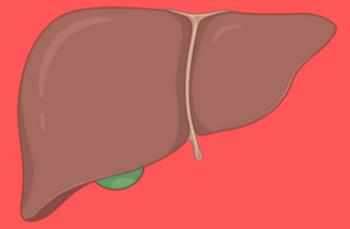
H

Hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC) is the most common inherited cancer syndrome causing bowel cancer, among other cancers. It is also known as Lynch syndrome. Please visit <https://lynchsyndromeireland.com> to learn more.



Irish Colorectal Cancer Community (Bowel Cancer Ireland) is an Irish patient led colorectal cancer community. The aims of the group are to support patients with colorectal cancer and to raise awareness of colorectal cancer, especially in those under 50 years of age. To learn more and support this organisation please visit <https://linktr.ee/bowelcancer>

J



Jaundice is a condition in which the skin and the whites of the eyes become yellow, urine darkens, and the color of stool becomes lighter than normal. Jaundice can occur when the liver is not working properly. If you think you notice jaundice seek medical attention.

K

KRAS gene is involved in controlling cell growth and cell death. The unchanged form of the gene is called wild-type KRAS. Altered forms of the KRAS gene are common in bowel cancer. These changes may cause bowel cancer cells to grow and spread in the body. Knowing whether a patient's cancer has an altered KRAS gene can help plan cancer treatment.

L

Lymph nodes are part of the body's immune system. They are small bean-shaped structures. Lymph nodes filter substances that travel through the lymphatic fluid such as cancer, and they contain white blood cells that help the body fight infection and disease. There are hundreds of lymph nodes found throughout the body. When a surgeon removes bowel cancer, they will remove the nearby lymph nodes to assess if the cancer has moved to the lymph nodes.

M

Multidisciplinary team is the healthcare professional team who meets to discuss all cases. This team includes surgeons, oncologists, nurses, radiologists (who interpret scans), genetic experts and pathologists (who assess cells under the microscope to see what type of cancer is present).

N

National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) is a HSE programme that coordinates efforts to improve cancer care, outcomes and mitigate its impact on society in the public health system in Ireland.

O

Oncologist is a medical doctor who specialises in treating cancer. Not everyone who is diagnosed with bowel cancer will need to meet an oncologist. If the cancer is caught very early sometimes the only treatment needed is surgery and the surgeon will remain linked with the patient to look for signs of recurrence after the surgery.

P

Piles or Haemorrhoids can be a red flag for something more sinister. Bleeding from the back passage should not be automatically dismissed as piles. Any new bleeding from the back passage should be reported to a medical practitioner.

Q

Quality of life is an important consideration when undergoing treatment for colon cancer. Patients' personal, psychological and spiritual needs are at the fore of treatment considerations.

R

Risk factors for the development of bowel cancer include inflammatory bowel disease, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, a diet high in processed food, diabetes, physical inactivity, raised BMI (body mass index), and early exposure to antibiotics. We can improve health outcomes by reducing some of these risks.

S

Screening aims to detect signs of bowel cancer at an early stage, where there are no symptoms. Screening tests can find precancerous polyps, which can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early, when treatment works best. Screening can be done in a number of ways. One way is by looking for evidence of tiny amounts of blood in stool that you cannot see.

T

Treatment options for bowel cancer depend on the circumstance and how advanced the cancer is. If the cancer is still in the early stages surgery is performed to remove the tumour. Sometimes chemotherapy and radiation therapy is needed before or after surgery. If surgery is not an option then the cancer can be treated with chemotherapy or immunotherapy to aim to keep the cancer under control.

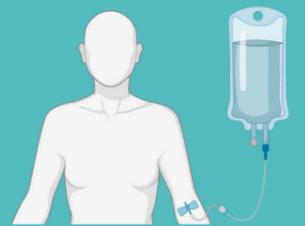
U

Unintentional weight loss is a red flag symptom for bowel cancer and should be reported to a medical practitioner for investigation.



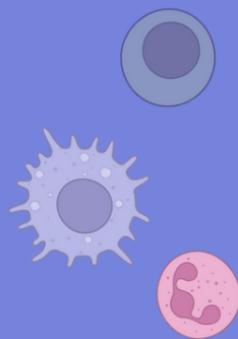
V

Veins are often used to deliver chemotherapy and other drugs to help treat colorectal cancer.



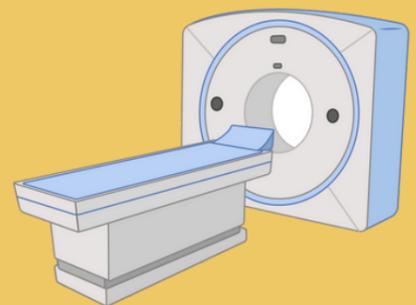
W

White blood cells are found in the blood and are responsible for fighting infection. Chemotherapy can cause a drop in the number of white blood cells which can lead to an increased risk of infection. Importantly, the white blood cell count is monitored for those receiving chemotherapy.



X

X-ray and other types of imaging are used during the diagnosis and treatment journey. Different imaging techniques such as x-ray, computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be required.



Y

Yoga and other forms of exercise – it is very important when going through treatment for cancer that one continues to keep active as this improves outcomes.



Z

Zzzzzzz-NEVER! If you have any red flag issues with your bowel do not sleep on the problem. Talk to a healthcare provider.

