

# Symptoms

## Bowel cancer

- Symptoms
- [Diagnosis](#)
- [Screening](#)
- [Causes](#)
- [Treatment](#)
- [Living with](#)

Bowel cancer is also known as colon cancer, rectal cancer or colorectal cancer.

Cancer that starts in your colon is called colon cancer. Rectal cancer is cancer that starts in your rectum.

The 2 cancers are usually grouped together under the name bowel cancer. This is because the colon and rectum are parts of your large intestine (bowel).

Bowel cancer is 1 of the most common types of cancer in Ireland.

It is the second most common cancer in men and the third most common cancer in women in Ireland.

Most people diagnosed with it are over the age of 60. But you can get bowel cancer at any age.

## Symptoms of bowel cancer

Symptoms of bowel cancer may include:

- changes in your poo, such as having softer poo, diarrhoea or constipation that is not usual for you
- needing to poo more or less often than usual for you
- blood in your poo, which may look red or black
- [bleeding from your bottom](#)
- tummy pain
- feeling a lump anywhere in your tummy
- bloating
- if you are losing weight for no reason

- feeling very tired for no reason
- breathlessness

You may have 1 or more symptoms.

## When to seek medical advice

### Contact your GP if:

- you have any of these symptoms

Do this even if you have had a recent normal bowel screening result. Do not wait till your next screening.

Having these symptoms does not always mean you have bowel cancer.

If your symptoms are caused by cancer, finding cancer early may mean it's easier to treat.


### Call a GP or out-of-hours GP immediately if:

- your poo is black or dark red
- you have bloody diarrhoea

 [Find a GP out of hours](#)

### Call 112 or 999 or go to your nearest emergency department if:

- you're bleeding non-stop
- there's a lot of blood - for example, you see large blood clots in the toilet
- you have tummy pain that comes and goes, can be severe, and happens after you eat

 [Find an emergency department](#)

► [What we mean by severe pain](#)

## What happens at your GP appointment

Your GP will ask about your symptoms and if you have a [family history of bowel cancer](#).

They may ask to do a simple examination of inside your bottom. This is known as a [digital rectal examination](#).

This is where they put a gloved finger inside your bottom to check for any lumps. Most people find this a little embarrassing. But it takes less than a minute.

Your GP will also examine your tummy (abdomen). This is a useful way of checking if there are any lumps in your tummy or bottom.

Your GP may also check your blood for [iron deficiency anaemia](#).

Most people with bowel cancer do not have symptoms of anaemia. But you may lack iron if you are bleeding.

## Referral to a specialist

Your GP may refer you to hospital for further tests.

They will do this if your symptoms suggest you may have bowel cancer or if they are not certain.

---

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Page last reviewed: 21 November 2023

Next review due: 21 November 2026

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 123.

---

## HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](#)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](#)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive