

# Overview - Bowel cancer screening

## Contents

1. Overview
2. [Bowel scope screening](#)
3. [Home screening kit](#)
4. [FAQs](#)

**Bowel cancer screening involves having tests to check if you have or are at risk of bowel cancer.**

## Why it's offered

Bowel cancer is a common type of cancer in both men and women. About 1 in 20 people will get it during their lifetime.

Screening can help detect bowel cancer at an early stage, when it's easier to treat. It can also be used to help check for and remove small growths in the bowel called [polyps](#), which can turn into cancer over time.

## Types of screening test

There are 2 types of test used in NHS bowel cancer screening:

- [bowel scope screening](#) – a test where a thin, flexible tube with a camera at the end is used to look for and remove any polyps inside your bowel
- [home testing kit \(the FOB test\)](#) – a kit you use to collect small samples of your poo and post them to a laboratory so they can be checked for tiny amounts of blood (which could be caused by cancer)

If these tests find anything unusual, you might be asked to have further tests to confirm or rule out cancer.

## When it's offered

NHS bowel cancer screening is only offered to people aged 55 or over, as this is when you're more likely to get bowel cancer:

- if you're 55, you'll automatically be invited for a one-off [bowel scope screening test](#), if it's available in your area
- if you're 60 to 74, you'll automatically be invited to do a [home testing kit](#) every 2 years
- if you're 75 or over, you can ask for a home testing kit every 2 years by calling the free bowel cancer screening helpline on 0800 707 60 60

If you're too young for screening but are worried about a family history of bowel cancer, speak to your GP for advice.

Always see a GP if you have [symptoms of bowel cancer](#) at any age – don't wait to have a screening test.

## **Risks of screening**

No screening test is 100% reliable. There's a chance a cancer could be missed, meaning you might be falsely reassured.

There's also a small risk that the bowel scope screening test and some of the tests you might have if screening finds something unusual could damage your bowel, but this is rare.

There are no risks to your health from the home testing kit.

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