

Bowel cancer

If bowel cancer is found and treated early, you have a good chance of getting better.

What is bowel cancer?

- It develops from a cancerous growth in any part of the large bowel.
- It is sometimes known as colorectal cancer.
- It may develop from growths on the bowel wall, called polyps. These are usually harmless, but may become cancerous.
- The large bowel is made up of several parts:
 - caecum
 - colon – divided into four parts (ascending colon, transverse colon, descending colon and sigmoid colon)
 - rectum
 - anus

How will I know I have bowel cancer?

You can have bowel cancer without noticing anything is wrong. Warning signs may include:

- blood or mucus in your poo
- diarrhoea or constipation for no reason
- tummy problems, i.e. feeling bloated, pain or cramps
- feeling tired all the time.

If you have any of these problems, see your doctor. You will have some tests to work out if you have bowel cancer.

What do the test results mean?

The test results will tell the doctor what type of bowel cancer you have, and if the cancer has spread (the stage). This information helps the doctors decide what treatment you need.

BOWEL CANCER

Staging

Stage 1 – the cancer is found only in the bowel wall

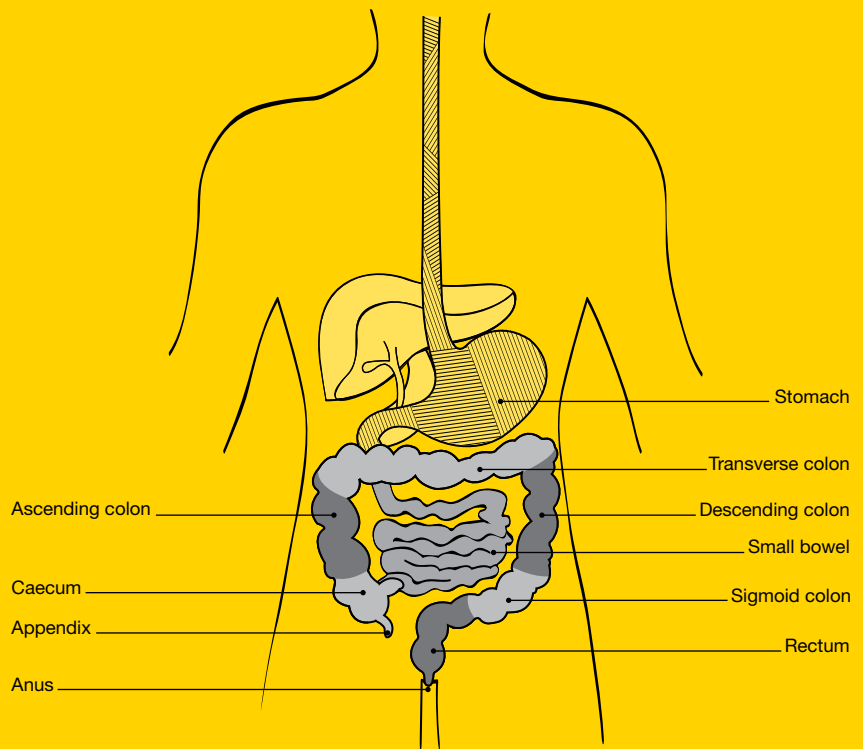
Stage 2 – the cancer has spread to the outer surface of the bowel wall

Stage 3 – the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes near the bowel

Stage 4 – the cancer has spread beyond the lymph nodes to other areas of the body, such as the liver or lungs

The bowel and the digestive system

The picture below shows the bowel. The bowel is part of the digestive system – the part of the body that turns food into energy.



Appendix

A small tube attached to the end of the caecum.

Caecum

A small pouch at the start of the large bowel.

Large bowel

This is the part that does all the work. It is made up of 4 parts – ascending colon, transverse colon, descending colon and sigmoid colon.

Rectum

The last part. It stores poo until it leaves the body.

BOWEL CANCER

What treatment will I need?

There are different types of treatment for bowel cancer. You may have one or more of these treatments:

- **Surgery** – removes the part of the bowel with cancer and joins the two ends together
- **Radiotherapy** – may be used before surgery to shrink the tumour, and some people may have it after surgery to kill cancer cells that remain in the area

Some people have radiotherapy to relieve pain and other problems caused by the cancer.

How will the treatment affect my body?

Treatment for bowel cancer can cause problems. An opening of the bowel onto the tummy is sometimes made during the surgery. This is called a stoma.

About 1 out of 8 people with bowel cancer need a permanent colostomy – a goona bag. You will learn how to take care of this.

How do I manage the cancer?

It is normal for you and your family to have lots of different feelings right now. Talking with your doctor, nurse or health care professional will help answer any questions you may have.

Depending on where you live, you might need to travel for treatment. You can get help to pay for travel and accommodation.

For more information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit www.cancercouncil.com.au
- Visit www.menzies.edu.au/cancer
- For current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer-related statistics, see www.aihw.gov.au

This information has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a Clinical Advisory Group and an Indigenous Consultation group. Production by Cancer Council.