

DON'T WIPE AWAY THE SIGNS

Symptoms of bowel cancer may include:

- Changes in your poo that are not usual for you
- Bleeding from your bottom (or blood in your poo)
- Pain, bloating or a lump in your tummy
- Losing weight without trying
- Feeling very tired but not sure why

Community Toolkit

Campaign overview

In October 2025 RM Partners North West and South West London Cancer Alliance is supporting a campaign to help more people recognise the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer and to contact their GP practice early with any concerns.

The campaign, Don't Wipe Away the Signs, is focusing on people over the age of 40, and those from lower socio-economic groups as they are more likely to experience a late-stage cancer diagnosis. It includes people in this age group from Black and South Asian ethnic backgrounds, who are known to experience health inequalities.

The campaign will run in areas of highest deprivation across all 14 boroughs in north west and south west London across buses, underground and overground stations, outdoor advertising, social media and online search engines and will be supported by local community and regional Transport for London (TFL) partnerships activity.

The bowel cancer awareness campaign will run from 1st-31st October 2025.

The key messages include:

- In England, over 36,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year, and it is the 4th most common cancer.
- Bowel cancer is cancer found anywhere in the large bowel, which includes the colon and rectum.
- It can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or where you live.
- The biggest preventable cause of bowel cancer in the UK is eating too little fibre.
- Knowing the symptoms are important, as the earlier bowel cancer is found the more treatable it's likely to be.
- Around 90% of people diagnosed with stage 1 cancer survive for 5 years or more, compared with around 10% of people who are diagnosed at stage 4.
- Having symptoms doesn't necessarily mean you have bowel cancer, but it's still important to find out what's causing them.

“Most people with bowel symptoms don’t have cancer, but if it is cancer, making the diagnosis early is what makes all the difference in making the treatment simpler and more successful. If you notice any changes in your bowel habits, such as bleeding from your bottom or blood in your poo or unexplained tummy symptoms, or if you experience any symptoms that are not usual for you for three weeks or more, please contact your GP practice.”

Dr Bushra Khawaja,
RM Partners Primary Care Cancer Lead, Hillingdon & Harrow



Bowel Cancer Symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- Changes in your poo, such as having a softer poo, diarrhoea or constipation that are not usual for you
- Bleeding from your bottom
- Needing to poo more or less often than usual for you
- Blood in your poo, which may look red or black
- Pain, bloating or a lump in your tummy
- Often feeling like you need to poo, even if you've just been to the toilet

Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason

Whilst it is less likely to be bowel cancer, it’s best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms for 3 weeks or more.

Risks and causes of bowel cancer

Diet

- The biggest preventable cause of bowel cancer in the UK is eating too little fibre. Eating too little fibre causes 28 in 100 bowel cancers (28%) in the UK.
- Eating lots of fibre (found in plant-based foods like wholegrains, fruit, vegetables and pulses like beans and lentils) reduces your risk of bowel cancer.
- Many studies have shown that eating lots of red meat (beef, lamb, goat) or processed meat (bacon, ham, pepperoni) increases the risk of bowel cancer.
- It is estimated that around 13 out of 100 bowel cancers (around 13%) in England are linked to eating processed meats.

Being overweight or obese

- It is estimated that 12 out of 100 bowel cancers (12%) in England are linked to being overweight or obese.

Smoking

- 7 out of 100 bowel cancers (7%) in England are linked to smoking. The risk increases with the amount and duration of smoking.
- People who smoke any type of tobacco product, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes and shisha, are more likely to develop polyps (non-cancerous growths) in the bowel which could turn into cancer if they're not treated.

Physical activity

- 5 out of 100 bowel cancers (5%) in England are caused by too little physical activity.
- Being active can help you keep to a healthy weight and reduce your risk of cancer. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week.

Alcohol

- Alcohol increases the risk of bowel cancer. It has been estimated that around 6 out of 100 bowel cancers (around 6%) in England are linked to drinking alcohol.



Risks and causes of bowel cancer

Age and getting older

- Bowel cancer is more common in older people.
- Globally and in the UK, we're seeing a small increase in rates of early onset cancers. This means they are affecting people aged 25 to 49 but it isn't clear what is contributing to the rise.

Family history

- Your risk of bowel cancer is increased if you have a first degree relative diagnosed with bowel cancer. A first degree relative is a parent, brother or sister, son or daughter.
- The risk is increased further if you have more than one relative diagnosed with bowel cancer or you have a first degree relative diagnosed at a young age, for example, under the age of 50.
- Some inherited conditions or syndromes associated with certain gene changes increase the risk of bowel cancer.
 - **Lynch syndrome:** People with Lynch syndrome have an 80% risk of getting bowel cancer and some other cancers and should be getting checked with a colonoscopy every year.
 - **Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP):** This is responsible for less than 1 in 100 (less than 1%) of all bowel cancers and should be getting checked every 1-3 years.

Other risk factors

- Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Benign polyps (non-cancerous growths)
- Exposure to ionising radiation



Campaign message

Below is content that you can use to communicate about this campaign in newsletters, emails, websites and e-bulletins.

RM Partners North West and South West London Cancer Alliance (RMP) is supporting a campaign to help more people recognise the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer and to contact their GP practice early.

The campaign is focusing on people over the age of 40 and those from lower socio-economic groups as they are most likely to experience a late-stage cancer diagnosis. It will also include people in this age group from Black and South Asian ethnic backgrounds, who are already at increased risk of health inequalities.

The key messages include:

- In England, over 36,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year, and it is the 4th most common cancer.
- Bowel cancer is cancer found anywhere in the large bowel, which includes the colon and rectum.
- It can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or where you live.
- The biggest preventable cause of bowel cancer in the UK is eating too little fibre.
- Knowing the symptoms are important, as the earlier bowel cancer is found the more treatable it's likely to be.
- Around 90% of people diagnosed with stage 1 cancer survive for 5 years or more, compared with around 10% of people who are diagnosed at stage 4.
- Having symptoms doesn't necessarily mean you have bowel cancer, but it's still important to find out what's causing them.



Campaign message

The key symptoms to look out for are:

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Other symptoms include:

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Whilst it is less likely to be bowel cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms for 3 weeks or more.

Don't wipe away the signs.

If you are aged 50 to 74, you will be invited to take part in the NHS bowel cancer screening programme. Please complete and return your screening kit when it arrives. If you have any bowel symptoms in between screening invitations, please contact your GP practice.



Dr Lavan Baskaran
GP
Croydon & Sutton

**DON'T WIPE AWAY
THE SIGNS**

Spreading the message

Suggested newsletter/web copy

The bowel cancer awareness campaign – ‘DON’T WIPE AWAY THE SIGNS’ - highlights key symptoms of bowel cancer and reminds people to contact their GP practice earlier to get their symptoms checked.

You may be more likely to get bowel cancer if:

- you're over 50
- you smoke
- you're overweight or obese
- you drink alcohol
- eat processed meat
- a close relative has had bowel cancer
- you have inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- you have small growths in your bowel called bowel polyps
- you have Lynch syndrome or Familial Adenomatous Polyposis

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Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
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Whilst it is less likely to be bowel cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms for 3 weeks or more.

Don't wipe away the signs. Early cancer diagnosis saves lives.

Visit www.dontwipeawaythesigns.com or search 'NHS Bowel Cancer'

#DontWipeAwayTheSigns #BowelCancerAwareness

**DON'T WIPE AWAY
THE SIGNS**

Dr Navdeep Alg
GP
Merton



Spreading the message

The suggested posts below can be used to help spread the message across social media

Bluesky / X – please tag @RMPartnersNHS

WhatsApp - for use in your own WhatsApp groups/ channels

Suggested post 1:

Know the symptoms of bowel cancer? Could be blood in your poo, pain or bloating in your tummy or changes in your poo that are not usual for you. If experiencing any of these for 3 weeks or more, contact your GP practice. More info: <https://dontwipeawaythesigns.com>
#DontWipeAwayTheSigns

Suggested post 2:

Bowel cancer is the 4th most common cancer in England, but very treatable when caught early. Don't ignore symptoms such as blood in your poo, pain or bloating in your tummy or changes in your poo that are not usual for you. Contact your GP practice. Visit <https://dontwipeawaythesigns.com> #DontWipeAwayTheSigns

Example social media assets which can be found online at <https://dontwipeawaythesigns.com>



For further information on how to order your resources or download shareable social media assets, visit www.dontwipeawaythesigns.com or www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer/symptoms/

Spreading the message

Instagram & Facebook

Instagram – please tag @rmpartnersnhs

WhatsApp - for use in your own WhatsApp groups/ channels

Suggested post:

Did you know the biggest preventable cause of bowel cancer in the UK is eating too little fibre. It is estimated that it's linked to 28 out of 100 bowel cancers (28%) in the UK.

When bowel cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

Please don't ignore the signs:

- Changes in your poo, such as having a softer poo, diarrhoea or constipation that are not usual for you
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Don't wipe away the signs. Early cancer diagnosis saves lives.

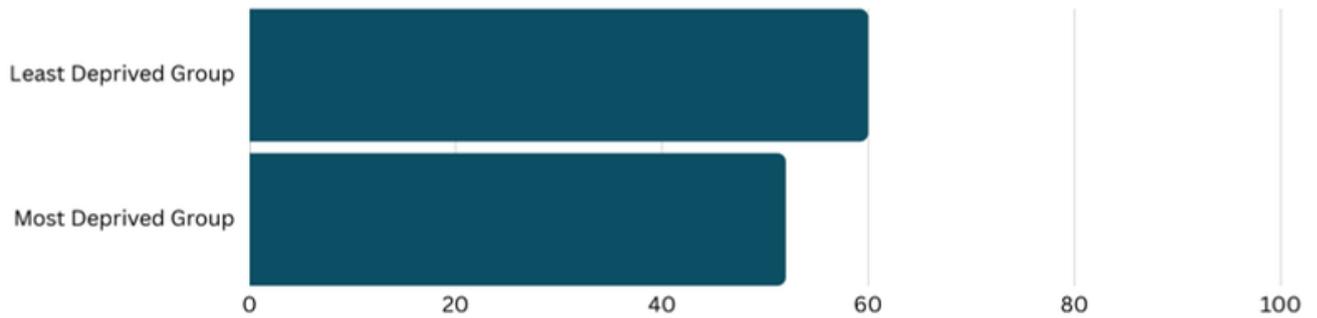
For more information visit www.dontwipeawaythesigns.com

#DontWipeAwayTheSigns #BowelCancerAwareness

For further information on how to order your resources or download shareable social media assets, visit www.dontwipeawaythesigns.com or www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer/symptoms/

Further information

In England, around 60% of people diagnosed with bowel cancer in the least deprived group survive their disease for 5 years, compared with around 52% of people in the most deprived group (2015-2019).

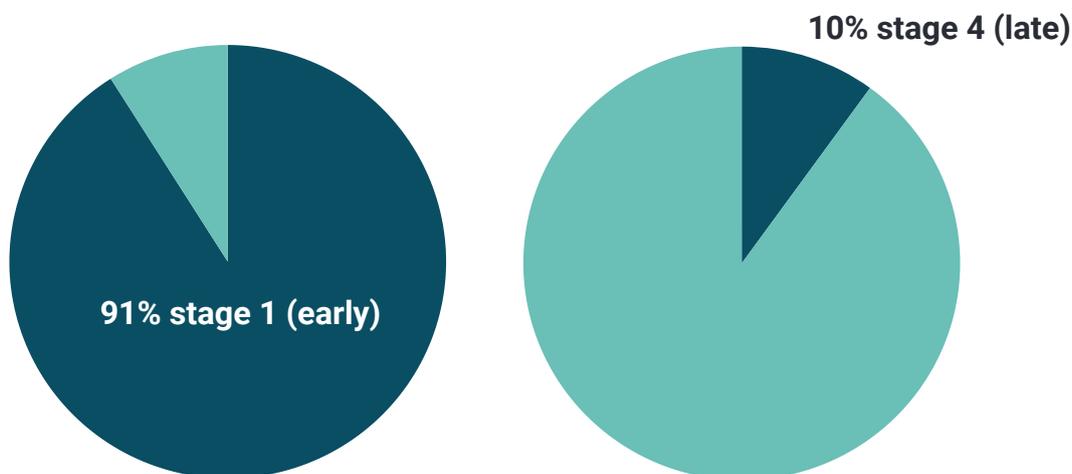


Source: NDRS Cancer Survival

On average, 19% of bowel cancers are diagnosed via emergency presentation (2018-2023) Source: COSD Level 3 and RCRD via CancerStats



Bowel cancer 5-year survival by stage (2015-2019)



What follow up tests or examinations to expect

Your healthcare professional might want to investigate your symptoms further. Below are the tests and examinations you may have.

- You may be asked to provide a poo sample (stool sample) for testing or be given a home test kit called a faecal immunochemical test (FIT), to collect a small sample of poo. These check if you're bleeding from your bowel, which can be a sign of bowel cancer.
- An abdominal (tummy) or rectal examination
- A blood test

To help you prepare for your appointment, tell your GP practice:

- Your smoking status (including passive smoking)
- If you have a family history of cancer, in particular bowel cancer
- Your latest weight measurement
- Your most recent alcohol intake (if you drink) – [calculate your alcohol intake](#)
- If you have a learning disability and/or a serious mental health condition to assess any needs
- If you have any mobility or physical impairment for example, dexterity issues (poor hand function) or require step free access
- Need a translator

What your healthcare professional needs to know

- If they refer you to hospital for further tests, make sure your healthcare professional has your correct address and telephone number, including a mobile number if you have one, as the hospital may contact you by telephone.
- If you are unable to attend appointments throughout the next four weeks, please tell your healthcare professional.
- If you need a translator, have access needs or would like a male or female healthcare professional, please let the hospital know in advance of your appointment.

Your initial appointment with the hospital may be a telephone or video call with a nurse specialist.

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