

# Bowel scope screening

I've been invited  
for NHS bowel  
scope screening.

This leaflet gives you  
information to help  
you choose whether  
to have screening.



NHS bowel scope screening is a new test to help prevent bowel cancer. It does this by finding and removing any small growths, called polyps, in the bowel that could eventually turn into cancer.

The NHS offers bowel scope screening to all men and women aged 55.

This leaflet aims to help you make a choice about whether to have bowel scope screening.

It includes information about:

- why the NHS offers bowel scope screening
- what to expect from it, and
- the benefits and risks.

If you would like a summary of facts and figures about bowel scope screening, please turn to pages 8 and 9.

### **Why does the NHS offer bowel scope screening?**

NHS bowel scope screening helps prevent bowel cancer. This means it saves 1 life from bowel cancer for every 300 people screened.

Some health problems mean that it might not be possible for you to have bowel scope screening. For more information, please turn to page 5.

# What is bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is the term used for cancer that begins in the large bowel. It is also called colorectal cancer. Bowel cancer often starts from small growths in the bowel called polyps.

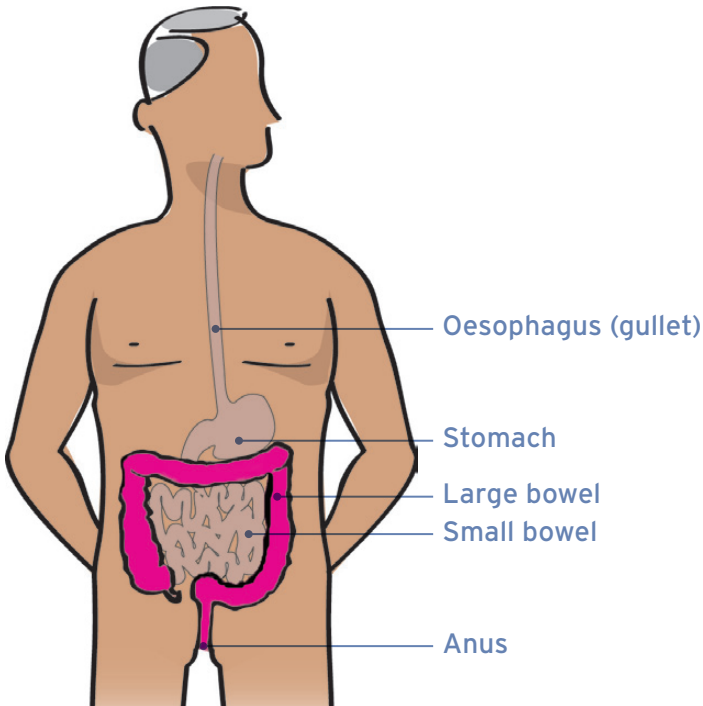
Polyps do not usually cause symptoms but some might turn into bowel cancer if they are not removed.

The bowel, also known as the intestine, helps to digest the food you eat. After food has gone through the bowel, all that is left is poo.

The bowel has two parts – the small bowel and the large bowel. The large bowel is coloured pink in the picture below.

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in the UK. About 1 in every 18 people will get bowel cancer in their lifetime. Both men and women are at risk. Bowel cancer is more common in older people – most people who get it are over the age of 55.

People can be at risk of bowel cancer even when nobody else in the family has had cancer.



# What is bowel scope screening?

Bowel scope screening uses a thin flexible tube with a tiny camera on the end to look at the large bowel.

It can find and remove small growths called polyps from the bowel. Polyps do not usually cause symptoms but some might turn into cancer if they are not removed. The technical term for bowel scope screening is flexible sigmoidoscopy screening (sometimes called 'flexisig').

## What does bowel scope screening involve?

Bowel scope screening is done by a specially trained nurse or doctor at an NHS bowel cancer screening centre. He or she puts the thin flexible tube into your anus and looks inside your large bowel using the tiny camera. Bowel scope screening looks at the lower part of the large bowel because that's where most polyps are found.

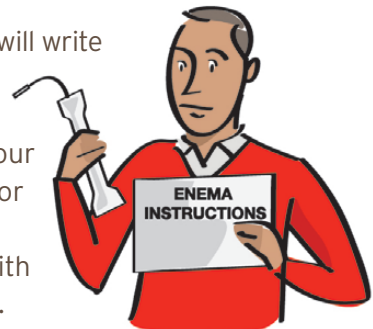
When the nurse or doctor puts the tube into your bowel, they gently pump some carbon dioxide gas inside. This opens up the bowel so the nurse or doctor can see any polyps.

If they find any polyps, they usually remove them straightaway. This is usually done using a tiny wire loop passed through the tube. Sometimes the nurse or doctor takes a tiny piece of the bowel (a biopsy) to be looked at under a microscope. Neither removing a polyp nor having a biopsy are painful.

## What will happen if I choose to have bowel scope screening?

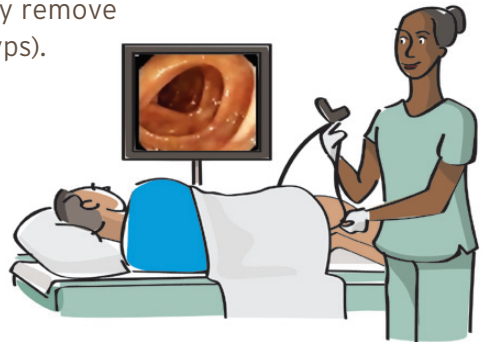
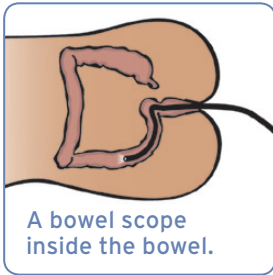
### Two weeks before your appointment

Your NHS bowel cancer screening centre will write to you. The letter will include an enema and instructions for using it. The enema is a liquid used to clear the poo out of your large bowel. This is so the nurse or doctor can get a good look at your bowel. The enema comes in a small plastic pouch with a nozzle. Most people find it easy to use.



## The day of your appointment

- Use the enema about one hour before leaving home for your bowel scope screening appointment.
- To use the enema, you will need to squeeze the liquid from the plastic pouch into your anus. The enema will make you poo very soon after you have used it.
- Make sure you go for a poo before you leave home for the screening centre. The enema should keep your bowel clear for several hours.
- After you arrive at the NHS bowel cancer screening centre, the nurse or doctor will explain what will happen, answer any questions and listen to your concerns.
- They will ask you to put on a hospital gown and lie down on a trolley ready to have bowel scope screening.
- During the screening, if you want, you will be able to see the inside of your bowel on a TV screen.
- The nurse or doctor will tell you straightaway if they remove any small growths (polyps).



## In the three weeks after your appointment

You will be sent a letter explaining the results of your bowel scope screening. Your GP will also get your results.

## **How long does bowel scope screening take?**

Having bowel scope screening usually takes only a few minutes but the whole appointment may take around an hour and a half.

Getting ready for your appointment and having bowel scope screening may take up to half a day, depending on how far away you live from the screening centre.

## **What does bowel scope screening feel like?**

Most people are glad they had bowel scope screening done and find it painless.

If you do feel pain, it almost always only lasts for a few moments. It is most often caused by the carbon dioxide used to open up the bowel, which may give you a bloating or cramping feeling in your tummy. If you do feel pain, tell the nurse or doctor and they will change what they are doing to make you feel as comfortable as possible. Having polyps removed from the bowel is not usually painful.

A few people say they find bowel scope screening embarrassing. The nurse or doctor will do their best to help you feel as relaxed as possible.

## **Does bowel scope screening have risks?**

Bowel scope screening is usually safe but in rare cases it can cause harm to the bowel. About 1 person in every 3,000 may have serious bleeding caused by bowel scope screening. Sometimes the bowel can be torn during bowel scope screening – this is even rarer.

In either case you would be admitted to hospital straightaway and you might need surgery. Most people make a full recovery.

When you go home after bowel scope screening, if you have any severe pain, or blood in your poo that does not go away after 24 hours, you should see a doctor straightaway.

The carbon dioxide pumped into the bowel is not harmful.

## Have I missed my chance if I don't go for bowel scope screening this time?

People are invited to have bowel scope screening only once, at the age of 55.

If you decide not to have bowel scope screening when you are first invited, you can still have it at any time up until your 60th birthday. Just call the Freephone helpline number **0800 707 60 60** to ask for an appointment.

At about age 60, you will be invited to have more bowel cancer screening using a different kind of test. This screening tests for traces of blood in poo, and is known as a Faecal Occult Blood test (FOB test for short). For more information on the FOB test, please see the leaflet called 'Bowel Cancer Screening: the facts' available from [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel).

## Can everybody have bowel scope screening?

Some health problems mean that it might not be possible for you to have bowel scope screening. Please call the Freephone helpline number **0800 707 60 60** if you:

- have had all of your large bowel removed, or have a stoma bag to collect your poo
- are currently being treated (for example, with steroids) for inflammatory bowel disease in your large bowel (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)
- are waiting for heart surgery or have had heart surgery in the last three months
- cannot walk more than 100 yards without resting because of a lung or heart problem, or
- think you may be too unwell to go for your appointment.

# Bowel scope screening results

## Most people will have a normal result

Out of 300 people who have bowel scope screening, 285 will have a normal result. This means that no polyps or cancers were found.

Even if you have a normal result, it is important to look out for symptoms of bowel cancer. This is because sometimes people can get bowel cancer even after a normal result. If you want to know more, please see 'What are the symptoms of bowel cancer?' opposite.

## Some people will have polyps

The nurse or doctor will usually remove any polyps they find. They will tell you straightaway if they have done this. Any polyps that are removed are sent to be checked under a microscope.

Out of 300 people who have bowel scope screening, about 14 will be offered another test because of the types of polyps found. This test is usually a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy uses a longer thin flexible tube, which can look for polyps further up the bowel. For more information on colonoscopy, please see the leaflet 'Having a colonoscopy' available from **[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel)**.

Very occasionally, people may be asked to come back for an operation to remove their polyps. This only happens to about 1 person out of every 1000 people who have bowel scope screening.

## Rarely, the screening will find cancer

Out of 300 people who have bowel scope screening, about 1 will be found to have bowel cancer already. If the screening does find cancer, the nurse or doctor will arrange for you to see a specialist as soon as possible. If cancer is found, it is likely to have been found at an early stage. This means you are likely to have a better chance of successful treatment and survival.



# What are the symptoms of bowel cancer?

Even if you have had bowel scope screening, it is important to look out for the symptoms of bowel cancer. You can still go on to get bowel cancer after having bowel scope screening. Also, bowel scope screening can sometimes miss polyps or a cancer.

## The symptoms of bowel cancer are:

- blood in your poo
- any changes in your bowel habits
- an unexplained lump in your tummy
- poo that is looser than normal
- unexplained tiredness or weight loss, and
- bloating, swelling or pain in your tummy.

If you have any of these symptoms for more than three weeks, you should make an appointment to see your GP.

Usually these symptoms won't mean you have bowel cancer. But if you do, going to see your GP makes it more likely the cancer is found early.

The earlier bowel cancer is found, the better the chance of successful treatment.

# What can I do to lower my chances of getting bowel cancer?

Bowel scope screening is the best way to lower your chances of getting bowel cancer.

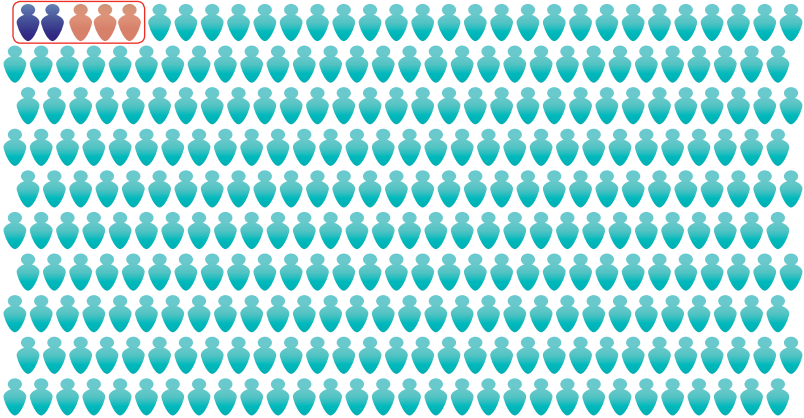
## You can also:

- be physically active
- keep a healthy weight
- eat plenty of fruit and vegetables and other high fibre foods
- eat less red meat and less processed meat
- drink alcohol in moderation, and
- not smoke.

# Bowel scope screening helps prevent bowel cancer

**5 out of 300 people** will get bowel cancer over 10 years if they are not screened.

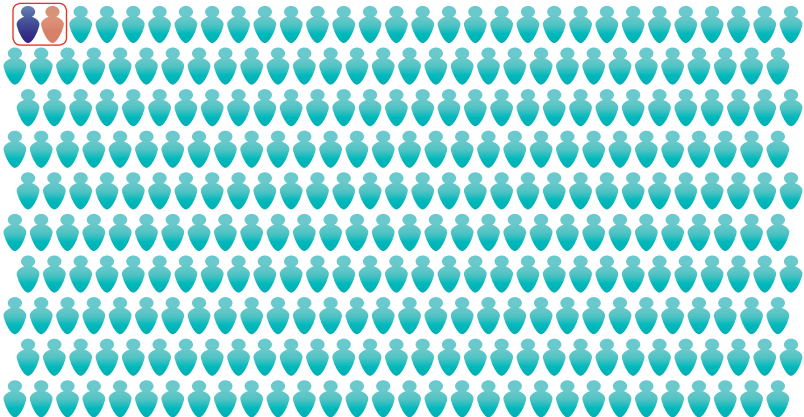
**2 fewer people** would get bowel cancer if they were screened.



# Bowel scope screening helps save lives from bowel cancer

**2 out of 300 people** will die of bowel cancer over 10 years if they are not screened.

**1 less person** would die of bowel cancer if they were screened.



# Facts and figures about bowel scope screening

## **“Could it prevent me from getting bowel cancer?”**

For every 300 people screened, 2 fewer people will get bowel cancer over 10 years. Please see opposite for more information.

## **“Could it prevent me from dying of bowel cancer?”**

For every 300 people screened, 1 less person will die from bowel cancer over 10 years. Please see opposite for more information.

## **“Are there risks?”**

About 1 person in every 3,000 may have serious bleeding caused by bowel scope screening. Even more rarely, the bowel can be torn.

## **“Could it miss something?”**

Bowel scope screening finds 4 out of 5 polyps that could turn into bowel cancer. Rarely, it can miss a cancer that has not caused symptoms higher up in the large bowel. This is because bowel scope screening only looks at the lower part of the bowel.

## **“Could I need more tests?”**

About 5 in 100 people who have bowel scope screening will be offered a colonoscopy to look at all of the large bowel.

## **“How long does it take?”**

Getting ready for your appointment and having bowel scope screening may take up to half a day.

## **“Is it embarrassing?”**

About 95 in 100 people say that bowel scope screening is not embarrassing.

## **“Is it painful?”**

About 3 in 100 people say they felt severe pain during bowel scope screening. About 80 in 100 say they felt no pain or only mild pain.

## **“Will I be pleased I had it?”**

About 98 in 100 people say they are glad they had bowel scope screening.

# Who can I contact if I have a question?

If you have any questions or concerns about bowel scope screening, please call the Freephone helpline number **0800 707 60 60**.

If you would like more detailed information, including the references to the resources we used to write this leaflet, please visit **[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel)**.

This leaflet is also available in Braille, as an audio version and in large print. You can find versions of the leaflet in languages other than English at **[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel)**.

Here is space for your notes ...



This leaflet was developed by Informed Choice about Cancer Screening – a team of experts at King’s Health Partners. [www.informedchoiceaboutcancerscreening.org](http://www.informedchoiceaboutcancerscreening.org)  
Funded by NHS Cancer Screening Programmes. December 2012. Review date November 2015