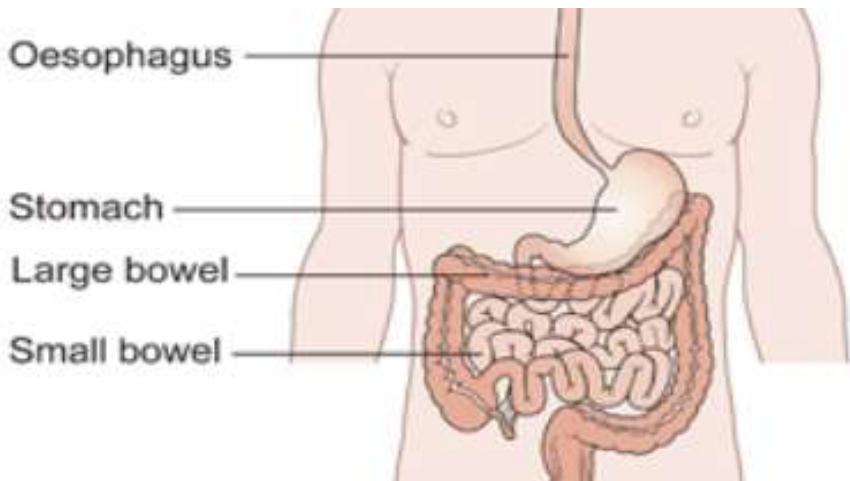


Reducing your Risk of Bowel (Colorectal) Cancer through Lifestyle Changes



Family Medicine Department

Reducing your Risk of Bowel (Colorectal) Cancer through Lifestyle Changes

Cancer is a term used to describe a group of more than 200 diseases that affect different areas of the body. Research has shown that many types of cancer are linked to our diet and lifestyle, which means there are steps we can take to prevent them. This leaflet is about reducing your risk of bowel (colorectal) cancer.

What is the bowel?

Bowel cancer is caused by damaged cells, which grow uncontrollably to form a tumour. Many different factors contribute to bowel cancer.

The bowel is part of the digestive system. The digestive system processes all the food we eat and helps to turn it into energy and nutrients for the body to use.

The bowel is divided into two parts: the small bowel (ileum) and the large bowel (colon and rectum).

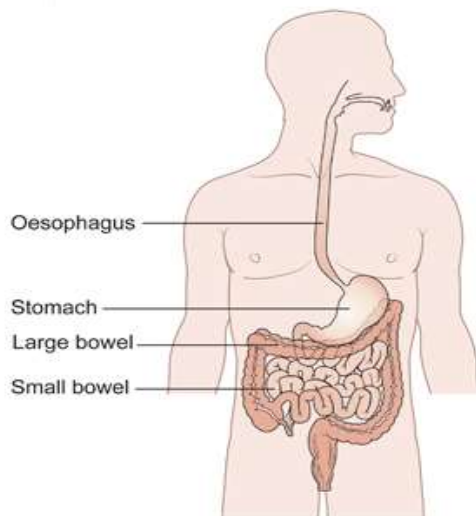


Diagram showing the position of the small bowel
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Nearly all bowel cancers are found in the large bowel.

Food passes down the food pipe (oesophagus) into the stomach. The food is digested and passes into the small bowel. Here the body absorbs nutrients from food. The food then passes through the large bowel, which absorbs water and forms the waste matter into stool. The stool is stored in the back passage (rectum) until it is ready to be passed out of the body.

What are the symptoms of Bowel cancer?

Symptoms of bowel cancer are varied between individuals but may include one or more of the following:

- Bleeding from the back passage (rectum) or blood in your stools.
- A change in normal bowel habits.
- A lump in your abdomen (more common in your right side) or in your rectum.
- A straining feeling in your rectum.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Pain in your abdomen or rectum
- Anemia (a low level of red blood cells) caused by the tumour bleeding.

Please note - these symptoms can also be caused by other diseases such as, haemorrhoids (piles), infections or inflammatory bowel disease. If you are worried about any symptoms you should see your doctor.

What do we know about diet and bowel cancer?

Researchers think that between 15-35 out of every 100 cancers may be preventable by changing our diets and lifestyle.

There is no one diet that can guarantee you won't get bowel cancer. But changing your diet could help to reduce your risk of cancer in general **as well as** improving your overall health.

What steps should you follow?

In addition to not smoking, the most important things you can do to prevent bowel cancer are:

1. Stay at a healthy weight

- Studies have shown that people who are overweight or obese have an increased risk of bowel cancer, particularly men.
- If you need to lose weight, aim to lose about 0.5 – 1kg per week. Eating healthy, eating less and exercising more will help you reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- If you are unsure if your weight is healthy or you would like help losing weight you can make an appointment to see the dietitian.



2. Reduce your consumption of red meat.

- There is strong scientific evidence of a link between red meat and bowel cancer. It is recommended that you limit red meat (beef, lamb, pork) to **500g** (cooked weight) per week.
- The research linking processed meat (like bacon, sausages, mortadella etc) with bowel cancer is even stronger, so it is recommended to avoid these meats as much as possible.
- Instead you can choose, chicken, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.



3. Increase the fibre content of your diet.

- Try to include more plant foods such as wholegrains (like wholegrain bread & pasta), pulses (like beans and lentils), and vegetables and fruits in your diet to keep your digestive system healthy.
- Studies have shown that the fibre and other nutrients in these plant foods can lower our risk of bowel cancer.



4. Be Physically active

- Studies have shown that people who do more physical exercise have a lower risk of bowel cancer.
- It is not fully understood why exercise helps: it could be because it affects hormone levels, changes the speed that your body ticks over and changes the time your food stays in the bowel. Regardless of its method exercise helps prevent bowel cancer and also uses up extra calories which can help you lose weight.
- You should aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity every day (such as brisk walking, cycling, dancing, swimming, jogging) and as your fitness improves you can aim for 60 minutes activity a day.



5. Limit alcohol intake

- The risk of bowel cancer increases by 15% in people who drink 12 units of alcohol per week. The risk is higher for people who drink more than this.



- If you choose to drink alcohol, limit it to no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women.

6. Increase the calcium content of your diet.

- Research has shown that calcium rich diets may lower the risk of bowel cancer.
- Aim for 2-3 cups of milk, yoghurt, laban a day. Try to choose low fat or skimmed versions of these products.



If you feel you would like any further dietary advice on the above, healthy eating or weight loss advice you can arrange a consultation with our dietitian in Awali Hospital by phoning appointments on 17757600



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