

Bowel cancer

This information is about bowel cancer and treatments for bowel cancer.

Any words that are underlined are explained in the word list at the end.

If you have any questions, ask your doctor or nurse at the hospital where you are having your treatment.

If you have any questions or want to talk to someone, you can call Macmillan Cancer Support on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

We have more information in [language] about different cancers, treatments and living with cancer.

Visit macmillan.org.uk/translations or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

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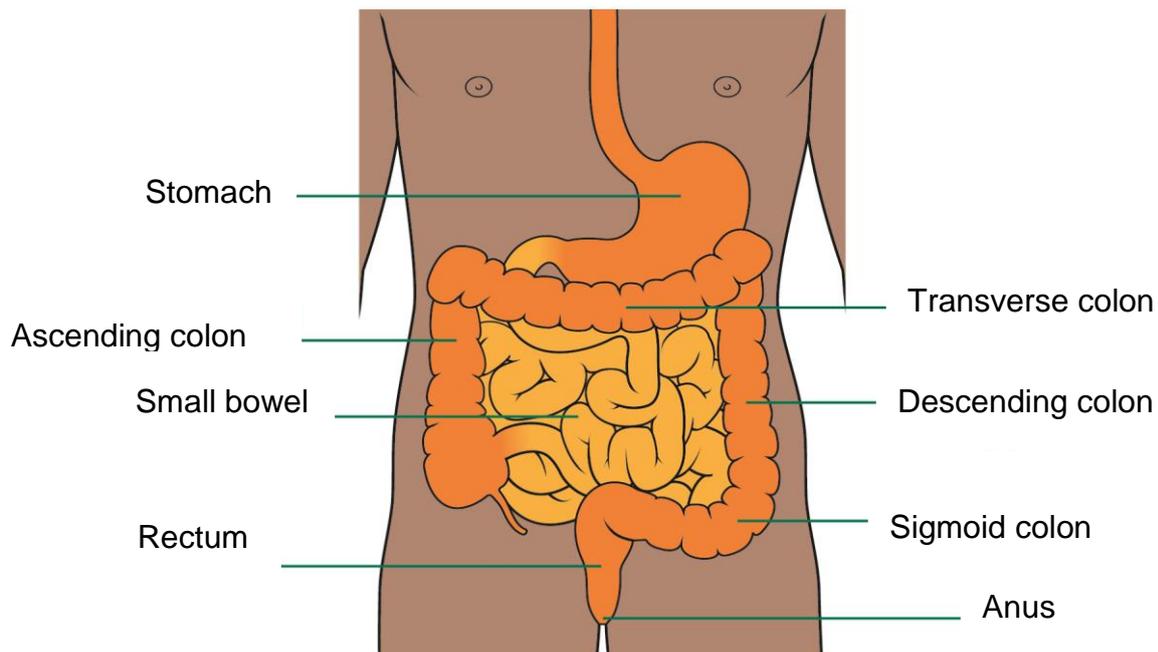
The bowel

The bowel is part of the digestive system, which breaks down and absorbs food so that the body can use it. It has two parts, the small bowel and the large bowel.

The large bowel has different parts. These are:

- the colon
- the rectum
- the anus.

The bowel



Bowel cancer

Cancer can affect different parts of the bowel. The two main types of bowel cancer are:

- colon cancer
- rectal cancer.

Cancer of the large bowel is also called colorectal cancer. Small bowel cancer and cancer of the anus are rare. We have information about these cancers in English. All parts of the body are made up of tiny cells. Bowel cancer happens when the cells in the bowel grow in an uncontrolled way and form a lump called a tumour. Most bowel cancers start in the lining of the bowel.

Sometimes, cancer cells spread to other parts of the body through the blood and the lymphatic system. This is called secondary cancer.

Bowel cancer is not infectious and cannot be passed on to other people.

Stages and grades of bowel cancer

- The stage of a cancer means how big it is and if it has spread.
- The grade of a cancer is how quickly the cancer may grow.

How treatment is planned

Your healthcare team will meet to plan the best treatment for you. Your doctor or nurse will talk to you about this plan. Your treatment will depend on factors, such as:

- the stage and grade of the cancer
- your general health
- the benefits of treatment and possible side effects
- what you think about the available treatments.

Talking to your healthcare team

It is important to talk about any treatment with your doctor, so that you understand what it means. After talking with you, your doctor will ask you to sign a consent form to show that you understand and agree to the treatment. This is called giving consent. You will not be given treatment unless you have agreed to it.

It is a good idea to take someone with you who can speak both [language] and English. Or your hospital can arrange an interpreter for you. Let your nurse know if you need one.

Questions to ask about your treatment

- What does my diagnosis mean?
- What is the stage and grade of the cancer?
- What treatments are available?
- What are the benefits, risks and side effects of each treatment?
- How will the treatment affect my daily life?
- Who can I talk to about how I am feeling?

We have more information in your language about being diagnosed with cancer.

Treatments for bowel cancer

Treatments for bowel cancer include:

- an operation (surgery)
- drugs (chemotherapy or targeted therapy)
- radiotherapy

Many people have more than one type of treatment, such as an operation and then chemotherapy or radiotherapy. There can be different types of treatment for colon or rectal cancer.

An operation

An operation (surgery) to remove the cancer is the most common treatment for bowel cancer.

Sometimes, very early-stage bowel cancers can be removed with a small operation called a local resection. The doctor removes the cancer using special surgical tools passed through the anus.

But most people will have an operation to remove part of the bowel. The doctor will usually also remove some lymph nodes from near the cancer. Lymph nodes are often where the cancer spreads to first.

You may have your operation as:

- open surgery
- keyhole (laparoscopic) surgery.

Open surgery means the surgeon makes a large cut before removing the cancer. During keyhole surgery, the surgeon makes 4 or 5 small cuts. They put surgical tools through the cuts to remove the cancer. You usually recover more quickly from keyhole surgery than from open surgery.

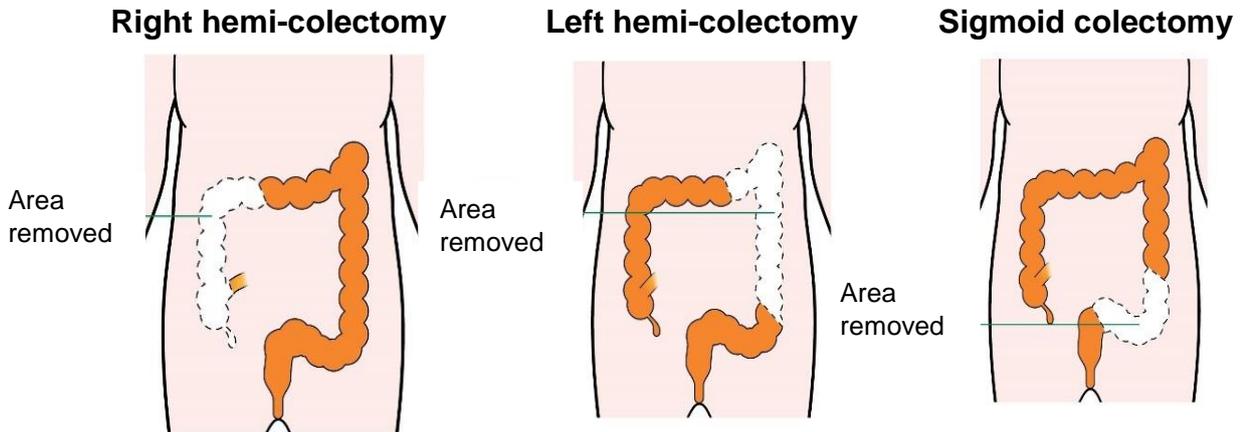
A surgeon performing keyhole (laparoscopic) surgery



Types of operation for colon cancer

- **Hemi-colectomy** – half of the colon is removed. This may be the right or left side, depending on where the cancer is.
- **Sigmoid colectomy** – the sigmoid colon is removed.

After removing the part of the bowel where the cancer is, the surgeon joins the two ends of the bowel together.



Very rarely, all the colon needs to be removed. This is called a total colectomy. Your doctor will tell you more about this if you need this type of operation.

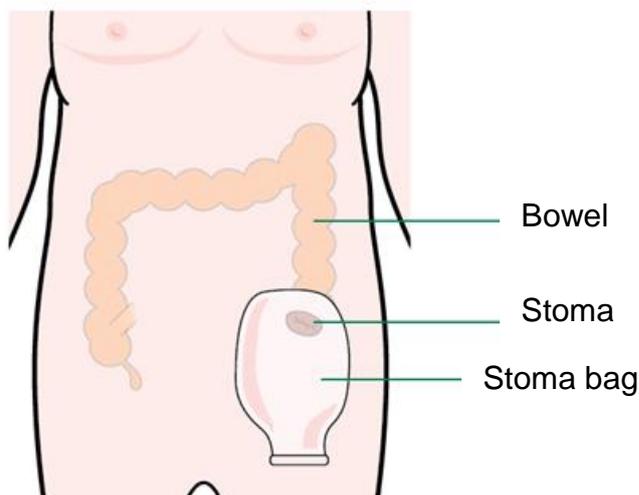
Stomas

If the ends of the bowel cannot be joined together, part of the bowel can be brought out onto the tummy (abdomen). This opening is called a stoma.

- If the stoma is made from the colon, it is called a colostomy.
- If the stoma is made from the small bowel (ileum), it is called an ileostomy.

You wear a special bag over the stoma to collect the poo.

A stoma and stoma bag



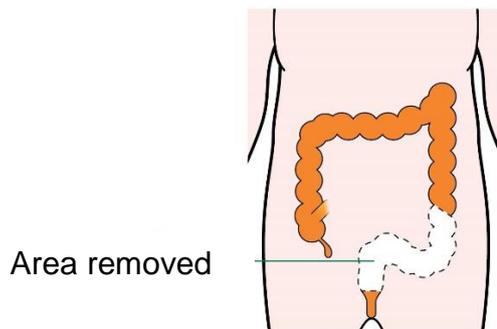
You may only have this for a short time after an operation, to allow the bowel to heal. But sometimes it may be permanent. A stoma nurse will show you how to look after the stoma and give you more advice and information.

Types of operation for rectal cancer

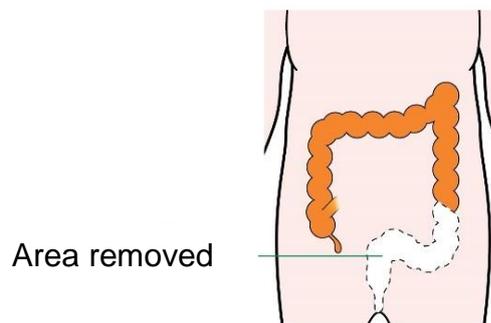
Anterior resection – the doctor removes the whole rectum with the fatty tissue and lymph nodes around it.

Abdomino-perineal resection – this is usually used for cancers near the lower end of the rectum. The doctor removes the rectum and anus. After this operation, you will have a permanent stoma.

Anterior resection



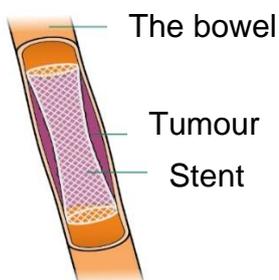
Abdomino-perineal resection



Types of operation for bowel cancer that has spread

Sometimes, colon cancer blocks the bowel and stops poo from passing through. This can cause tummy pain and vomiting. The doctor may insert a thin tube (stent) into the bowel to keep it open. If this is not possible, they may remove the blocked part of the bowel with an operation.

A part of the bowel with a stent inside



You can sometimes have surgery to remove cancer that has spread to other parts of the body, such as the liver or lungs.

We have more information in [language] about surgery and some of the side effects you may have.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer drugs to destroy cancer cells. You do not usually need chemotherapy for early stage bowel cancer.

Chemotherapy can be given:

- after surgery to reduce the risk of cancer coming back
- before surgery for a cancer that has spread – this is to shrink the cancer and reduce the risk of it coming back
- as the main treatment for cancer that has spread.

Chemotherapy drugs can cause side effects that make you feel unwell.

Different drugs can cause different side effects. These include:

- being more likely to get an infection
- feeling tired
- feeling sick or being sick
- a sore mouth
- hair loss.

Your doctor can talk to you about the side effects you may have and how to manage them. Most side effects can be controlled with drugs. Most side effects go away when chemotherapy is over.

We have more information in [language] about chemotherapy and some of the side effects you may have.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays to destroy the cancer cells. You would not usually have radiotherapy for colon cancer but it is a common treatment for rectal cancers.

You may have radiotherapy before an operation for rectal cancer. It can be given to make the cancer smaller and easier to remove. Radiotherapy also reduces the chance of rectal cancer coming back. You will have the operation a few weeks after finishing the radiotherapy.

Radiotherapy may be used after an operation if there is a chance that some cancer remains.

If rectal cancer has spread or comes back, you may have radiotherapy to make it smaller. It can also help with symptoms such as pain.

We have more information in [language] about radiotherapy and some of the side effects you may have.

Chemoradiation

If you have a rectal cancer, you may have chemotherapy and radiotherapy together. This is called chemoradiation. It can work better than chemotherapy or radiotherapy alone but the side effects may be worse.

Targeted (biological) therapies

Targeted therapies use the differences between cancer cells and normal cells to stop cancer cells growing. They may be used to treat bowel cancers that have spread.

Side effects include:

- feeling tired
- dry skin or a rash
- diarrhoea
- flu symptoms.

Most side effects can be controlled with drugs and go away when treatment is over.

Possible side effects of your treatment

We have more information in your language about common cancer treatment side effects. Our information about tiredness and eating problems may also be helpful.

Below are some other side effects that you may have during and after bowel cancer treatment.

Bowel changes

After treatment, your bowel may work differently for a while. You may:

- have diarrhoea
- need to poo more often
- not get much warning when you need to poo
- have a sore bottom.

These usually improve over time. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have these side effects or if they do not improve. They can give you advice and medicines to help.

Protect your skin

Having loose or watery poo can make the skin around your bottom sore.

These tips may help:

- Keep the skin around your anus (back passage) clean and dry.
- Use unperfumed wet wipes as they are softer on your skin than toilet paper.
- Use barrier creams to help protect your skin – but only use creams that your doctor and nurse have recommended.
- Wear cotton underwear to keep your skin dry and cool.

Diet changes

Sometimes food such as fruit and vegetables may make your poo loose and make you go to the toilet more often. It can help to keep a diary of what you eat and how this affects you. This can help you choose what to eat and what to avoid.

If you do not feel like eating, it can help to eat several small meals a day instead of 1 or 2 large meals. If you continue to have problems with what you can eat, speak to your nurse or doctor.

Anxiety

Feeling anxious or worried can also make your poo looser. Learning how to relax may help your bowel to settle and is also good for your general health and recovery.

If you have a stoma

If you have a temporary or permanent stoma after your operation, you will need some time to adjust to it. You may find it helps to talk to someone else with a stoma. Your nurse may be able to arrange this for you. Your nurse will teach you how to manage your stoma at home.

Macmillan toilet card

If you need to use a toilet urgently when you are out, you can carry a free Macmillan toilet card. You can show this in places such as shops, offices and cafes. We hope it helps you get access to a toilet but it may not work everywhere.

You can get one by calling our Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**. Or, you can order it on our website at **be.macmillan.org.uk**

You can also use disabled toilets. They have a wash basin and space to change your clothes. Disabled toilets are sometimes locked. You can buy a key from Disability Rights UK.

Follow up

After your treatment has finished, you will have regular check-ups and tests. These may continue for several years, but will become less often.

Your feelings

You may feel overwhelmed when you are told you have cancer and have many different emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel. There are many ways to cope with this. Talking to a close friend or relative may help. Your doctor or nurse can help too.

How Macmillan can help

Macmillan is here to help you and your family. You can get support from:

- **The Macmillan Support Line (0808 808 00 00).** We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use. We can answer medical questions, give you information about financial support, or talk to you about your feelings. The phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.
- **The Macmillan website (macmillan.org.uk).** Our website has lots of English information about cancer and living with cancer. There is more information in other languages at macmillan.org.uk/translations
- **Information centres.** At an information centre, you can talk to a cancer support specialist and get written information. Find your nearest centre at macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres or call us. Your hospital might have a centre.
- **Local support groups** – Find a group near you at macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups or call us.
- **Macmillan Online Community** – You can talk to other people in similar situations at macmillan.org.uk/community

Word list

Word	Meaning	English	Transliteration
	Waterproof cream that protects the skin from body fluids.	Barrier cream	
	The tiny building blocks that make up the organs and tissues of our body.	Cells	
	A cancer treatment that uses drugs to kill cancer cells.	Chemotherapy	
	A stoma made from part of the colon.	Colostomy	
	Finding out whether you have an illness or not.	Diagnosis	
	When you have soft or watery poo. You might need the toilet more than usual or very urgently. You may also have tummy pain.	Diarrhoea	
	Cancer that has only just started to grow and has not spread to other parts of the body.	Early stage	
	A stoma made from part of the small bowel.	Ileostomy	
	The part of the small bowel that joins with the colon.	Ileum	
	A network of vessels and glands throughout the body that helps to fight infection.	Lymphatic system	
	A gland that is part of the <u>lymphatic system</u> .	Lymph node	

	A cancer treatment that uses high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells.	Radiotherapy	
	Unwanted effects of cancer treatment.	Side effects	
	An opening into the body made by a surgeon.	Stoma	
	Nurse who will show you how to care for the stoma.	Stoma nurse	
	Having an operation.	Surgery	
	Drugs that attack cancer cells and do less harm to normal cells.	Targeted therapy	
	A group of cells that are growing in an abnormal way. The abnormal cells keep multiplying and form a lump.	Tumour	

More information in [language]

We have information in [language] about these topics:

<p>Types of cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast cancer • Bowel cancer • Lung cancer • Prostate cancer <p>Treatments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemotherapy • Radiotherapy • Surgery 	<p>Coping with cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you're diagnosed with cancer – A quick guide • Eating problems and cancer • End of life • Financial support - benefits • Healthy eating • Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer • Side effects of cancer treatment • What you can do to help yourself
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To see this information, go to macmillan.org.uk/translations

Speak to us in [language]

You can call Macmillan free on **0808 808 00 00** and speak to us in your own language through an interpreter. You can talk to us about your worries and medical questions. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

References and thanks

This information has been written and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team.

This fact sheet is based on more detailed Macmillan information, which we can send you or you can read online. The more detailed information is only available in English.

This information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Kimberly Bennet, Macmillan Lead Clinical Nurse Specialist; Kathryn Hair, Macmillan Information and Support Centre Manager; and Aileen Roy, Macmillan Colorectal Cancer Nurse Specialist. Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition.

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

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We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. Macmillan cannot accept liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third-party information such as information on websites to which we link.

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