



Together we will beat cancer

Supporting the recognition, referral and management of suspected bowel cancer



There are around 44,100 new bowel cancer cases in the UK every year. When bowel cancer is diagnosed at its earliest stage, survival is much higher compared to when it is diagnosed at a late stage.

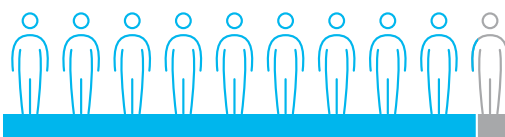
Primary care plays an important role in the diagnosis of bowel cancer. Almost 60% of cases in England are diagnosed via an urgent or routine GP referral, and a further 10% of cases are diagnosed via screening, where the route to diagnosis is known.

The Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) is used to detect invisible traces of blood in faeces. It is used as the primary bowel cancer screening test in the UK and as a test to inform management of patients with bowel cancer symptoms. The threshold for determining a positive result is lower in symptomatic patients compared with the bowel cancer screening programmes. Please see an overview of UK bowel cancer screening programmes below.

Bowel cancer survival by stage at diagnosis

Proportion of people surviving their cancer for five years or more

Diagnosed at earliest stage



More than 9 in 10

Diagnosed at latest stage



1 in 10

Earliest stage = stage 1; latest stage = stage 4.

Data is age-standardised net survival for adults (aged 15 to 99 years) in England in 2015-2019 followed up to 2020.

Source: Cancer survival in England, NHS Digital 2022.



Symptomatic patients should be offered a FIT regardless of their participation in and result from bowel cancer screening. Bleeding may occur intermittently, and a person's risk of having bowel cancer can change over time. Patients should therefore also be supported to make an informed choice to participate in bowel cancer screening when they are invited, even if they have recently received a negative FIT symptomatic result.

Bowel cancer screening programmes at a glance

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Age	60-74 [a]	50-74	55-74 [a]	60-74
Frequency	2 yearly On request from 75	2 yearly On request from 75	2 yearly	2 yearly
Technology	FIT	FIT	FIT	FIT
Threshold	120µg/g	80µg/g	150µg/g	150µg/g
Uptake [b]	70% (2021/22)	67% (2020-22)	67% (2020/21)	54% (2017/18) [c]

[a] People aged 50-59 will be invited to participate, as a phased approach over the next few years.


[b] Caution should be taken when making comparisons across countries due to differences in time periods of data, age ranges and/or differences in the definitions of coverage and uptake of screening.

[c] Bowel cancer screening uptake data in Northern Ireland relate to the previous gFOBT test.

Key resources to support health professionals

When people present to their GP with symptoms, cancer referral guidelines such as [NICE \(NG12\)](#), [NICaN](#) and the [Scottish Cancer Referral Guidelines](#) can aid the assessment of patients and help guide referral decisions. You can also consult the [UK-wide BSG/ACPGBI FIT guidance](#), which supports GPs to use FIT alongside their clinical judgement and practice robust safety netting.

Screening resources

[View our bowel cancer screening webpage for further information and resources](#) 



Your Good Practice Guide to bowel cancer screening

Read the latest evidence and good practice tips to support discussions with eligible patients around informed participation in bowel cancer screening. The guide offers an overview of the bowel cancer screening programme in the UK, practical tips and templates such as GP letters, text and phone call scripts.

[Access our Good Practice Guide](#)




Support patients to complete their bowel cancer screening FIT kit

We have produced a variety of resources to support people to complete their screening FIT kit. These include a video animation, which can be displayed on your practice TV screens, and a step-by-step guide that explains how to successfully complete a bowel cancer screening FIT.

[View patient bowel screening resources](#)

Symptomatic resources

[View our FIT Symptomatic webpage for further information and resources, including guidance on safety netting](#) 



Know the key differences in the use of FIT

FIT is used in bowel cancer screening and to inform the management of symptomatic patients. View our infographics which explain the key differences in how FIT is used in screening compared to symptomatic pathways in each UK nation.

[View FIT key differences infographic](#)



Support patients to complete symptomatic FIT kits

We have produced a 'How to do your FIT' leaflet to support symptomatic patients complete their test. The resource aims to increase the number of people who successfully perform and return their FIT kit, and reduce the number of rejected tests. Download our handy guide and share with patients when you ask them to complete a symptomatic FIT.

[Patient leaflet: 'How to complete your FIT'](#)

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