

# Important Facts about Bowel Cancer

1. It is the most common internal malignancy in Australia.
2. It is the second most common cancer in men (second to prostate) and in women (second to breast).
3. 1 in 22 Australians will develop bowel cancer during their lifetime (1 in 18 men; 1 in 24 women).
4. Most bowel cancers develop from benign polyps, small mushroom-like growths which occur on the internal lining of the bowel (large intestine or colon).
5. Polyps are very common; however most do not become malignant.
6. If polyps are diagnosed and removed, the incidence of bowel cancer falls by greater than 90% when compared with the expected incidence.
7. A polyp less than 1.0cm has a less than 1% chance of cancer, whereas a polyp greater than 2.0cms has up to 40% chance of cancer. 85% of polyps less than 1.0cm do not bleed and are therefore missed by testing for blood in the bowel motion. 70% of polyps larger than 2.0cms are identified, but 30% are not. This means that up to 12% (or 1 in 8) cancers may be missed by testing the bowel motion only. However, testing for blood is cheaper and easier, and any form of testing is better than nothing!
8. Removal of a polyp when it is small and without symptoms, is therefore the best time to do so, thereby virtually eliminating the risk of bowel cancer. Colonoscopy is currently the most effective method to find polyps, and the only available method to remove them.
9. More than 12,000 new cases occur each year in Australia.
10. Nearly half the patients will die from the disease, however the earlier the diagnosis, the greater the cure rate.
11. The risk starts around 40 and is uncommon at an earlier age. It increases progressively with age; screening should generally commence at 50.
12. A family history doubles the risk of bowel cancer (1 in 9 men, 1 in 13 women); screening should commence at 40 (or 10 years earlier than the relative's cancer).
13. Identifiable high risk groups are:
  - First degree family history of bowel cancer (parent, sibling, child)
  - Personal history of bowel polyps and/or bowel cancer
  - Personal history of (chronic) inflammatory bowel disease
14. Most patients with bowel cancer have no symptoms.
15. Once symptoms occur (e.g. change in bowel habit) the bowel cancer may possibly be more advanced.
16. The most common symptoms of established bowel cancer are:
  - Blood in the bowel motion
  - Change in bowel habit
  - Low blood count (anaemia)
  - exercising regularly
  - do not smoking

For more detailed information on screening, please visit our website, [www.getscreened.com.au](http://www.getscreened.com.au)