



## **BOWEL(Colorectal) CANCER SCREENING – GENERAL INFORMATION**

This brochure tells you about screening tests, Bowel Cancer and Bowel Cancer screening.

### **What is a screening test?**

A screening test is not the same as a diagnostic test. Screening is used to reduce the risk (eg: of death) in people that do not have any signs or symptoms of a disease, but they are at risk of getting it. Screening programs should identify people who have increased risk factors and send them for relevant diagnostic tests.

For example, people who do not have any signs or symptoms of the disease are screened and then classified as likely or unlikely to have the disease.

### **What is Bowel Cancer?**

Bowel cancer is where a malignant (cancerous) growth develops inside your large bowel (colon) or rectum. The cancer usually develops from tiny growths called polyps, however, only a small number of polyps become cancerous.

### **What is Bowel Cancer Screening?**

Bowel cancer screening involves testing well people (people who **do not** have symptoms of cancer) for polyps or cancer. If polyps or cancer are found and tested at an early stage there is more chance it can be cured.

In Australia, for people at an average risk of bowel cancer, the method for testing is Faecal Occult Blood Testing (FOBT). This is a chemical test used on stools (faeces) which will show if there is blood in your stool. Blood in your stool may be one of the early signs of cancer. The government has begun a National Bowel Cancer Screening Program using FOBT. Between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, Australians turning 50, 55 or 65 years of age are being invited to be part of this program.

For people of higher than average risk – for example, people with a strong family history of bowel cancer or polyps, other tests, usually colonoscopy are more appropriate.

In other countries, governments and authorities have also started screening programs. Some also use FOBT. Some have different options including

FOBT, colonoscopy, “virtual colonoscopy” and sigmoidoscopy. See your doctor for more information on what screening tests you can have.

## **Methods of Bowel Cancer Screening**

It has been shown in scientific studies that testing for blood in your stool with a test kit (Faecal Occult Blood Test - FOBT) and then having further tests if your results are positive, can lower your risk of dying from bowel cancer.

If you have a positive test result, you will need to have a colonoscopy. This involves a bendable tube, which has a light and lens on it, being passed into your rectum to look inside your bowel. If you have polyps, these can usually be removed during colonoscopy. If there is a cancer, a biopsy (sample) can be taken for testing.

In many countries, including Australia and the United Kingdom, FOBT is the only funded (paid for by government) method of screening for bowel cancer.

## **Further Information**

For more detailed information, please see [Inside Radiology](#), a resource produced especially for consumers by the [Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists](#).

If you would like to look at other relevant brochures, please see the Diagnostic Imaging Pathways website - [www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au/includes/consumer.html](http://www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au/includes/consumer.html)

or

For further information please contact your doctor or see your local health web site. Some of these are as follows:

[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk)  
[www.cancernet.nci.nih.gov](http://www.cancernet.nci.nih.gov)

## **Consumer Participation**

This information has been reviewed by representatives from the following groups:

- Aboriginal people
- People with disabilities
- Seniors
- CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse)
- The Health Consumers' Council.

## Feedback

The Division of Imaging Services, Royal Perth Hospital is committed to providing a friendly and professional service. If you would like to provide feedback on this information sheet, please send to:

Quality Coordinator  
Imaging Services  
Royal Perth Hospital  
GPO Box X2213  
Perth WA 6000

## References

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing - [www.cancerscreening.gov.au](http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au)

### Website

For more information go to [www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au)

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