

Bowel cancer (also known as colorectal cancer) can develop without early warning signs or symptoms. The cancer can grow inside the bowel for many years before it is detected. Often, small amounts of blood can leak from these growths and pass into bowel motions.

What is a Faecal Occult Blood Test?

A Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) can detect minimal amounts of blood in your bowel motions.

The test involves taking samples from two or three bowel motions using a test kit. These are analysed at a pathology laboratory, and if blood is detected, further tests may be required.

The primary type of FOBT in Australia is the immunochemical or iFOBT. Kits are sent out as part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. They can also be purchased from pharmacies. Immunochemical tests do not require changes to diet or medication, and samples are taken from two or three separate bowel motions, depending on the kit used.

Can anyone have an FOBT?

If you have no symptoms or family history of bowel cancer, an FOBT is recommended every two years from age 50.

Risk increases significantly after the age 50. You are also at a greater risk if you have:

- a previous history of polyps in the bowel
- a previous history of bowel cancer
- chronic inflammatory bowel disease (ie Crohn's disease)
- a family history of bowel cancer
- familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (Lynch syndrome)
- increased insulin levels or diabetes.

If you are at increased risk, discuss screening options with your doctor.

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is a population-based screening program for bowel cancer administered by the Australian Government.

As part of the phasing in of the Program, the following age groups are being invited to participate:

2019: 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 74.

By 2020, all Australians aged 50 to 74 will be offered the test free every two years.

A test kit is mailed to people eligible for the program. Samples are collected in the privacy of your home and sent to a pathologist for analysis. Results are sent to you and your nominated GP.

If the FOBT is positive, further tests are needed.

For more information visit bowelcancer.org.au

Where can I get an FOBT?

Cancer Council recommends all average-risk Australians aged 50 and over screen for bowel cancer with an FOBT every two years.

If you are not eligible for a free test under the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, you can still be tested. Contact your GP to discuss options. Your GP can request an FOBT, which is eligible for a Medicare benefit. Most pathology practices bulk bill for the test.

Other options:

- Some pharmacies have FOBT kits available for purchase over the counter
- Some pathology services or health organisations provide online options for purchasing a kit.

What do my test results mean?

If your FOBT results are positive, this means blood has been detected in your sample. About one in 14 people will have a positive FOBT result.

A negative test result means that no blood has been detected. This does not mean that you do not have or won't develop bowel cancer in the future. If you have a negative result you should test again in two years.

Bleeding may be caused by a number of conditions, including polyps, haemorrhoids or inflammation, and may not necessarily be cancer-related. However, the bleeding needs to be investigated and if blood is detected, you should contact your doctor to discuss the results and what further tests will be required.

Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.

WHERE CAN I GET RELIABLE INFORMATION?

Cancer Council 13 11 20

Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

www.cancer.org.au

Cancer Council Australia website

[About bowel cancer](#)

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

Information Line 1800 118 868

cancerscreening.gov.au