

Colorectal cancer

Information for the public

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Colorectal cancer: the care you should expect

Colorectal cancer starts in the colon or rectum, which are parts of the large bowel (so it's also known as bowel cancer). Colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the UK, with over 41,000 people diagnosed each year. Treatment usually involves surgery but there are other options as well, such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy, and you might need a combination of treatments. There may be decisions to make about which treatment to have or how soon to start it, and it's important to be prepared for the side effects of the treatment itself. Good information and support helps people choose what's right for them.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with colorectal cancer and their families by making sure:

- people get good, balanced information about suitable treatments and what they involve
- care teams take the time to help people weigh up their treatment options, both for now and later, and to understand the side effects of each treatment
- people can see a specialist during or after treatment if they need to
- people get good follow-up care and advice after their discharge.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there any risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you in particular?
- How will the treatment affect your day to day life?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about colorectal (bowel) cancer.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Bowel Cancer UK](#), 020 7940 1760
- [GUTS UK](#), 020 7486 0341
- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#), 0808 808 00 00

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by colorectal cancer and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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