

Information about the Danish bowel cancer screening programme

Bowel cancer screening

Every year, approximately 5,000 people in Denmark are affected by cancer in the colon and rectum (bowel cancer), most of them being over the age of 50. If you are aged between 50 and 74, you can be screened for bowel cancer.

In this pamphlet, you can read more about the screening process, to help you decide whether to have a bowel cancer screening or not.

The Danish Health Authority recommends screening for bowel cancer based on an overall assessment of the benefits and harms. But it is important that you make the decision yourself.

If you are already in treatment or undergoing control for bowel disease, you will need to consult your doctor about when bowel cancer screening is relevant for you.

If you do NOT wish to accept an offer of screening for bowel cancer, you can register this on the website: www.sundhed.dk

If you change your mind, you can always register again. If you choose not to participate in the bowel cancer screening programme, this will not affect your opportunities to be examined and treated for bowel cancer or other diseases.

What is bowel cancer screening?

Screening for bowel cancer is an examination of men and women who do not have symptoms of bowel cancer. The purpose is to detect the disease early, so that there are better treatment options and so that fewer will die from cancer. Screening is not the same as a full examination for bowel cancer.

Even if you are screened, you may still have or develop bowel cancer. It is important that you see your doctor if you have symptoms.

How the screening is performed

Examination of a stool sample

Screening for bowel cancer is performed by submitting a stool (faeces) sample, which is examined for small amounts of blood. If no blood is found in your stool sample, you will be offered to send a sample again after two years.

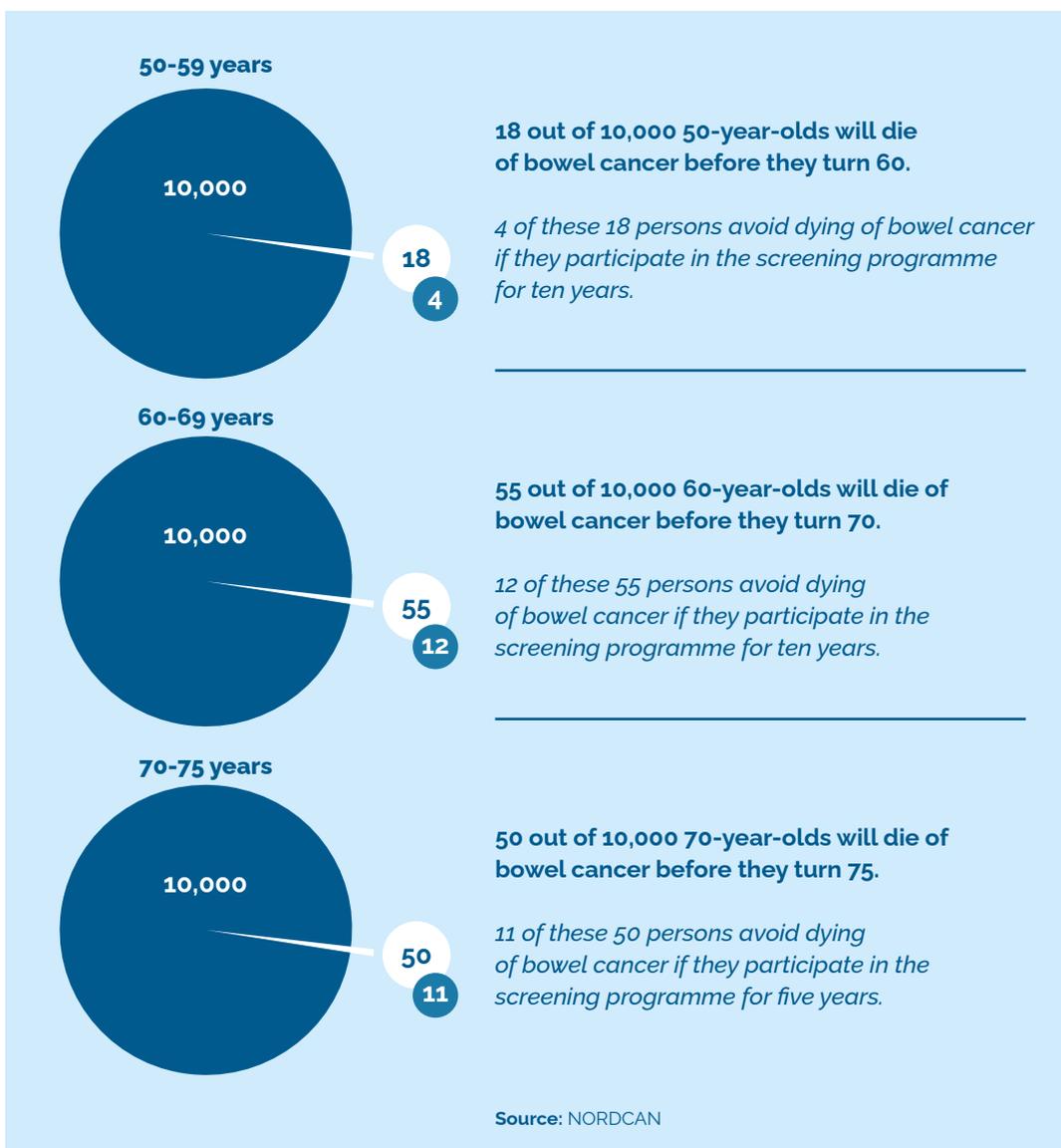
Colonoscopy

If blood is found in your stool sample, you will be offered a colonoscopy. The Region in which you live must offer an examination within 14 days from the examination of the stool sample.

The colonoscopy can show if you have cancer or polyps (growths in the bowel) that can develop into cancer. Before the colonoscopy, you need to clear your bowel with a laxative. If you say no to the colonoscopy, you will still be offered a new examination of a stool sample after two years.

What is my risk?

Around **5,000** people in Denmark get bowel cancer every year. Most are aged over 50. Just under **1,800** people in Denmark die of bowel cancer every year.



Your risk of getting bowel cancer is higher:

- The older you are
- If you have a family history of bowel cancer
- If you have a low-fibre diet and eat a lot of red meat
- If you are overweight
- If you smoke or drink too much alcohol

Facts about bowel cancer screening

If 10,000 people participate in one round of the screening programme, the following will happen:



9,540

are informed that no blood is found in their stool sample. 16 of them will nevertheless be diagnosed with bowel cancer later on

460

are informed that blood is found in their stool sample and they are therefore offered a colonoscopy

– 17

have bowel cancer detected through the colonoscopy

– 109

have polyps detected with a moderate or high risk of developing into cancer

– 151

are told that they do not have cancer or high-risk polyps, even though there were signs of blood in their stool sample

One have a serious complication, such as perforation of the intestine, bleeding or collection of blood in the intestinal wall. There is an extremely low risk of dying from complications from a colonoscopy.

Source: Dansk Tarmkræftscreeningsdatabase årsrapport 2021

Pros and cons of screening

What are the pros of screening?

Lower risk of dying from bowel cancer

There are better treatment options if cancer is detected at an early stage. By attending bowel cancer screening, you can reduce your risk of dying from bowel cancer.

Less invasive treatment

If the cancer is detected early, there is a better chance that you can be treated with less invasive surgical techniques and you are less likely to need medical treatment for the cancer.

What are the cons of screening?

Worries and false alarm

Even if blood is found in your stool sample, it is not certain that you have cancer or other disease in the colon and rectum. The cause may, for example, be bleeding from a scratch or haemorrhoids (piles). The period in which you are waiting for the test results or further examinations may cause anxiety.

False reassurance

Even if no blood is found in the stool sample, you may still have or develop bowel cancer.

Discomfort

Some people experience discomfort related to taking a stool sample. Most people experience discomfort when clearing their bowel with a laxative before the colonoscopy, but the extent of the discomfort varies.

Unnecessary treatment

The examinations can detect cancer that, in some cases, would not have negative consequences during your lifetime. The examinations can also detect polyps that will not develop into cancer. By participating in the examinations, you therefore risk being offered a treatment that is unnecessary, which, in rare cases, may have adverse effects

Further examination

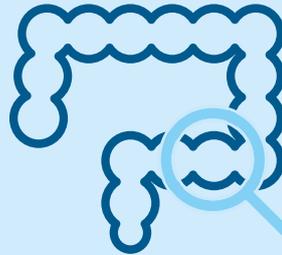
If blood is found in your stool sample, you will be offered a colonoscopy of your colon and rectum.

There are three possible results of the examination:

1. You do not have cancer or polyps: Either your colon and rectum were found to be completely normal, or another harmless cause of bleeding was found, for example a haemorrhoid. Your risk of developing bowel cancer will be very small. You will therefore not be offered examination of a stool sample for the next eight years if you will be still under 75 by then.
2. You have polyps: If polyps are found in your colon or rectum, you will be offered to have them removed during the colonoscopy. The polyps will be examined for abnormal cells, and you will be offered treatment and control depending on the result of the examination.
3. You have cancer: If bowel cancer is detected, you will be offered a quick and planned course of diagnosis and treatment ('cancer patient pathways').

Symptoms of bowel cancer

- Changed bowel movement
- The intestine does not empty itself properly
- Unexplained fatigue
- Stomach ache
- Blood or mucus in your stools
- Weight loss without reason



Where can you get help?



The region

If you have any questions about the screening, please contact the Region you live in. You can see who to contact in your invitation.



Your doctor

If you have symptoms of bowel cancer, you should always consult your doctor to have it examined more closely. This also applies even if you participate in the screening programme.



You can read more about bowel cancer, the screening programme and the numbers presented in this pamphlet on the Danish Health Authority's website: www.sst.dk/screening.

Health for all ♥ + ●