

Questions to ask about Diagnosis and Treatment

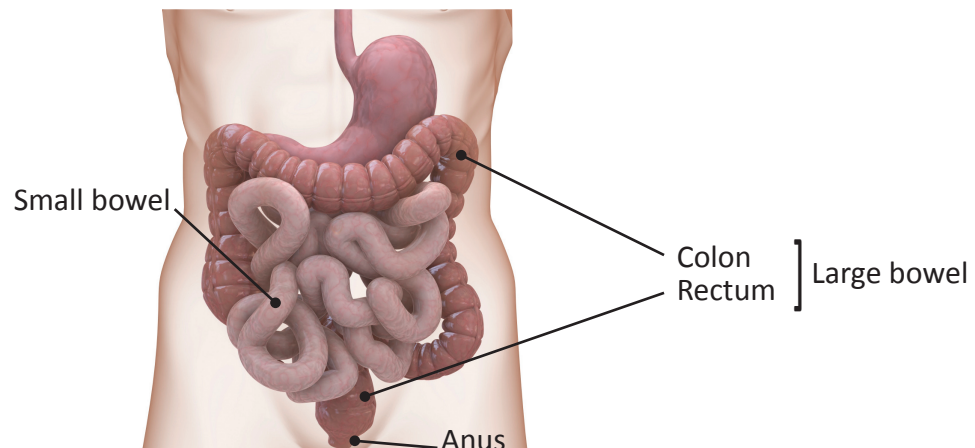
This factsheet has been written to help you to get the most out of your appointments with your GP or oncologist (cancer specialist). If you have any questions about your consultations, or wish to discuss any concerns about bowel cancer, please call our **Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on freephone 0800 8 40 35 40**.

Research has shown that people only retain part of the information they are given. You may find it helpful therefore to:

- Bring a relative or friend to the consultation
- Make notes
- Use a tape recorder (check the doctor has no objection first) and
- **Ask as many questions as you need**

Questions

- **What are the results of the tests I have had?**
Possible tests include colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, x-rays, barium enemas, biopsies, scans, blood tests
- **Where exactly is the cancer? (please indicate)**



- **What is the stage of my cancer and what does this mean?**
Dukes and/or TNM (Tumour, Node, Metastases) staging are two ways of examining the stage the cancer has reached. Dukes staging is based on how far the cancer has spread from Dukes A through Dukes, B, C and D

Dukes A: cancer is contained within the lining of the bowel or rectum

Dukes B: cancer has grown through the full thickness of the lining and muscle wall of the bowel or rectum

Dukes C: cancer has spread into the lymph nodes surrounding the affected part of the colon or rectum

Dukes D: cancer has spread beyond the original site to other organs. This is known as metastatic (or secondary) bowel cancer



TNM staging is a slightly more complex yet similar scale of categorising the cancer stage. This examines the size of the tumour (T) from T1 to T4, the number (N) of close lymph nodes that are affected (N0 to N2), and if the cancer has spread to other organs as metastases (M0 to M1)

- **What are the treatments available to me?**
You may receive a variety of treatments. Common forms include surgery, keyhole surgery, surgery and/or chemotherapy, radiotherapy, monoclonal antibodies. For a more detailed explanation on the forms of treatment, you may wish to refer to our factsheet Treatment Options for Bowel Cancer
- **Why is this particular treatment recommended for me?**
- **What will it involve?**
- **If I have surgery:**
 - How many days will I have to spend in hospital?
 - What are the risks?
 - Who will perform the operation?
 - Do I have a choice of hospital?
- **If I have chemotherapy:**
 - Will I have to come into hospital to receive my treatment and how long will I have to stay?
 - How often will I receive treatment and how long will it last?
 - What are the potential side effects?
- **If I have radiotherapy:**
 - Will I have to come into hospital to receive my treatment and how long will I have to stay?
 - How often will I receive treatment and how long will it last?
 - What are the potential side effects?
- **Are there any trials of new treatments I could participate in?**
What would be the pros and cons of joining a trial?
- **Will I need a colostomy bag or stoma?**
If yes:
 - Why?
 - Will it be permanent?
 - In what ways will this affect my everyday life?
 - Is there someone I can talk to about it and what ongoing support can I expect?
- **Who can I contact in an emergency?**
- **Is there any financial support available to me?**
- **Am I likely to need further treatment after surgery and what will this involve?**
- **Will I need to change my diet after surgery?**



- **How will my bowel habits change after treatment?**
- **What is my prognosis?**
- **What are the chances of the cancer returning or spreading?**
- **What follow-up should I expect after my treatment?**
- **Where can I, my family or friends find out more about my cancer and is there anyone I/we can talk to who has had this treatment or is able to help?**
e.g. nurse, support group, counsellor, websites, literature
- **Will my sexual function be affected in any way?**
- **Is there a higher risk of bowel cancer in my family now that I have it?**

You may find the following additional factsheets helpful:

- Treatment Options for Bowel Cancer
- Understanding Bowel Cancer
- Chemotherapy for Bowel Cancer
- Radiotherapy for Bowel Cancer
- Treatment for Rectal Cancer

Information correct as at date of publication (March 2009)

**For further information contact the Bowel Cancer
Advisory Service on: (Freephone) 0800 8 40 35 40**

Email: advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Website: www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1071038

London office

7 Rickett Street

London SW6 1RU

Tel: 020 7381 9711

Fax: 020 7381 5752

Edinburgh Office

20 Queen Street

Edinburgh EH2 1JX

Tel: 0131 225 5333

Fax: 0131 225 2206