

Living with Bowel Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Living with bowel cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

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Coping with bowel cancer

It can be very difficult coping with a diagnosis of bowel cancer, both practically and emotionally. You may feel very upset and confused at first. As well as coping with the fear and anxiety that a diagnosis of cancer brings, you have to work out how to manage practically. There may be money matters to sort out. Who do you tell you have cancer? There may be children or grandchildren to consider.

The coping with cancer section of CancerHelp UK contains lots of information you may find helpful. There are sections on

- Your feelings
- Talking to people: who and what to tell
- Talking to children
- How you can help yourself
- Who else can help you
- Sex and sexuality
- Coping financially including information about benefits and sick pay, mortgages, pensions, loans and insurance

Your feelings and bowel cancer

When people first find out they have colorectal cancer they may feel a range of emotions. All sorts of feelings are likely to come and go. Your family and friends will probably have strong feelings too.

You may feel isolated and find it difficult to talk to people. It is not unusual to feel embarrassed about having cancer of the bowel or rectum at first. Our bowels and going to the toilet are very private matters for many people. It is up to you who you tell.

There is a lot of support available. You may find it easier to talk to someone outside your immediate family and friends. You could find a support group or join online support websites like Cancer Chat.



It is quite common nowadays for people to have counselling after cancer treatment. To find out more about counselling, look in the coping with cancer section of CancerHelp UK. Or you could contact one of the bowel cancer organisations.

Coping with a stoma after bowel cancer

Some people have a colostomy or ileostomy as part of their treatment for bowel cancer. It can take a while to get used to dealing with a stoma, but there is a lot of support available. Your stoma nurse can help by giving advice and support.

As you learn to manage your stoma, the effect it has on your day to day life should lessen. With time, things like going to work, going out to socialise and taking part in sports and hobbies will feel easier.

It is normal to feel worried about how you will look, and how others may react. There can be practical worries about the bag being noticeable, or smelling. Or you may have emotional worries about your friends or partner rejecting you. Stoma bags are very well designed. They cannot be seen through your clothes and should not smell. If you do notice any smell, talk to your stoma nurse.

Many people find that if they talk openly to close family and friends their fears of rejection disappear. Most people want to understand what is happening so that they can help if they can.

Sex and bowel cancer

Most people are able to have a normal sex life after having had colorectal cancer. You will need time to get over surgery, or any

other treatment you have had. You should not have sex for at least 6 weeks after major surgery.

Many people do not feel like sex while they are having treatment. Try not to worry about this. Side effects and general tiredness are bound to get in the way. If you have had a colostomy or ileostomy you may also feel self conscious about the change in your body.

You will probably find that talking things over with your partner can help. You may prefer to talk to a specialist counsellor, either alone or with your partner.

Sometimes, radiotherapy or an operation to the rectum can affect the nerves to the sex organs. A man may not be able to get, or keep, an erection. A woman may find that sex feels different from before the treatment. Women may also find after radiotherapy that their vagina shrinks slightly and gets narrower.

These effects do not affect everyone who has bowel cancer treatment and they may get better over time. Occasionally, they can be permanent. There is more information about sex, sexuality and cancer in the coping with cancer section of CancerHelp UK.

Diet after bowel cancer

You may need to change your diet after treatment for colorectal cancer. You will find your digestion takes time to settle down whatever treatment you have had.

Diet after surgery

If you have had part of your colon removed, your stool may become less solid because the colon normally absorbs water



as the stool passes through. If you have had a large part of your colon removed, you may have diarrhoea. Let your doctor or nurse know if this happens, as they can give you medicine to help control it.

Particular foods may upset the way your bowel works and you may need to experiment with your diet to find out which they are. If you have problems you can ask to see a dietician.

Diet after radiotherapy

Radiotherapy to the bowel often causes diarrhoea. This can take a few weeks to settle down after treatment has finished. Your doctor can give you tablets to help control the diarrhoea.

Diet and chemotherapy

Chemotherapy for colorectal cancer can give you diarrhoea and may make you feel sick. These side effects will disappear after your treatment is over. You can gradually get back to a normal diet.

What to ask your doctor about living with bowel cancer

- Where can I get help dealing with my feelings?
- Do I have to pay for counselling?
- Who can answer any questions I have about living with my colostomy?
- When can I go back to work?
- Can I take up my usual sports, hobbies and activities again?
- Is there anyone I can talk to about treatment affecting my sex life?
- Can my partner talk to them too?
- What should I do if I have difficulty with my diet?
- Can I see a dietician here?
- What practical help is available?

- Can I get any help with money?
- Can anyone help me with claiming benefits?

Bowel cancer organisations

Cancer Research UK
 Main website: www.cancerresearchuk.org
 Patient information website:
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>
 Cancer Information Nurses phone: 0808 800 4040

Beating Bowel Cancer
 Tel: 08450 71 93 00 (Mon to Thur, 9am to 5.30pm - Fri, 9am to 4pm)
 Nurse advisory line: 08450 71 93 01 (Mon to Thur, 9am to 5.30pm - Fri, 9am to 4pm)
 Website: www.beatingbowelcancer.org
 Email: info@beatingbowelcancer.org
 Nurse Email:
nurse@beatingbowelcancer.org

Bowel Cancer UK
 Tel: 0800 8 40 35 40 (Bowel cancer advisory service - Mon to Fri, 10am to 4pm)
 Website: www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk

The Colostomy Association
 Tel: 0118 939 1537
 Helpline: 0800 587 6744 or 0800 328 4257
 Website: www.colostomyassociation.org.uk

CORE
 Tel: 020 7486 0341
 Website: www.corecharity.org.uk

This organisation used to be called the Digestive Disorders Foundation. They produce information and leaflets on common digestive diseases and illnesses, including bowel cancer.



Notes

More information

For more information about bowel cancer, visit our website
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in December 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).