

Britons want bowel cancer screening recommendation

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Britons want a recommendation from the NHS on whether to attend [bowel cancer screening](#), along with all the information on benefits and risks, according to research published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today.

The study involved interviews with nearly 2,000 UK adults aged 50-80, asking if they would prefer a recommendation to be screened for [bowel cancer](#) from the [NHS](#) or advised to make the decision themselves. They were also asked if they wanted to know about all the risks and benefits.

Eighty four per cent wanted an NHS recommendation to attend screening and more than three quarters of those asked wanted all the available information.

There was no difference in the [preference](#) for a recommendation between richer and poorer people or between older and younger. But men were more likely than women to want a recommendation.

By 2025, it is predicted that bowel screening will save over 2,000 lives from bowel cancer each year in the UK. Like all [screening tests](#), bowel [cancer](#)

[screening](#) is not perfect. People sometimes get a 'false positive' result. This means they are sent for follow-up tests (which can be worrying and they have risks of their own) but nothing is found. People also sometimes get false negatives, meaning a cancer could be missed.

New technologies are being developed and introduced into the bowel cancer screening programme in England. In 2010, Cancer Research UK helped to fund a trial into the use of the [Flexi-scope](#). This new one-off test for people in their mid-fifties can prevent bowel cancer from developing by finding and removing [polyps](#) that could otherwise turn into cancers. The government has promised to fund a national programme of Flexi-scope screening due to start early next year.

Professor Jane Wardle, lead author and director of Cancer Research UK's [Health Behaviour](#) Research Centre at UCL, said: "We have seen that most people who wanted a screening recommendation also wanted all the available information. This suggests that advice from an expert is an important part of the decision-making process and not an alternative to it.

"The study also showed that most people in the UK have a high level of trust in the NHS, which may explain why so many people are so keen to have a clear recommendation from it."

Sara Hiom, director of information at Cancer Research UK, said: "This study gives a much clearer picture about what information people want when being invited to bowel screening. This is very timely and we hope it will help the development of new information for the public.

"The study's importance goes beyond the information provided by the NHS – it will also help cancer charities like Cancer Research UK to develop the information we offer to the public about screening.

"Cancer Research UK funds research into new methods and technologies to prevent and detect bowel cancer earlier, as well as to improve the outcomes for people who are diagnosed with bowel cancer. But it's essential that this work is coupled with accessible information for the general public."

More information: Waller, J., et al.,
Communication about colorectal cancer screening
in Britain: public preferences for an expert
recommendation. *British Journal of Cancer* DOI:
[10.1038/bjc.2012.512](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2012.512)

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