



SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

And with Spring, for many, comes hay fever and associated symptoms. The UK has some of the highest rates of allergies in the world, with over 20% of the population affected by one or more allergies.

But what is an allergy?

An allergy is the response of the body's immune system to normally harmless substances, such as pollens, foods, and house dust mites. Whilst in most people these substances (allergens) pose no problem, in allergic individuals, their immune system identifies them as a threat and produces an inappropriate response.

When a person encounters a particular allergen they are allergic to, a reaction occurs. This begins when the allergen enters the body, triggering an antibody response. When the allergen comes into contact with the antibodies, these cells respond by releasing certain substances, one of which is called histamine.

These substances cause swelling, inflammation and itching of the surrounding tissues.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN ALLERGY?

Symptoms can include:

- Sneezing
- Wheezing/coughing / shortness of breath
- Sinus pain/runny nose
- Itchy eyes, ears, lips throat and mouth
- Nettle rash/hives
- Sickness, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps or vomiting after an insect sting
- Vocal changes (hoarse voice)
- **Anaphylaxis** is a serious allergic reaction - read more at www.nhs.uk/conditions/Anaphylaxis/
- Difficult or noisy breathing
- Dizziness collapse/loss of consciousness (due to a drop in blood pressure)
- Swelling of tongue and/or throat or other areas
- Difficulty in swallowing or speaking.

Testing for allergies can be complicated and is not always needed.

Medication, including antihistamines, can work well for many types of allergy, but some people may need further treatment.

LET'S TALK ABOUT STRESS...

Stress is not an illness but it can make you ill. Stress affects all of us at some point... 74% of people in the UK have at some point felt so stressed that they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope.



Stress is our body's response to pressures from a situation or life event. It can be defined as the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope, as a result of unmanageable pressures. When we encounter stress, our body is stimulated to produce stress hormones that trigger a "flight or fight" response and activate our immune system. This response helps us to respond quickly to dangerous situations. When working properly, it can help you stay focused, energetic and alert. The problem occurs when our body gets stressed in inappropriate situations.

...AND WHAT TO DO WHEN IT STRIKES

Symptoms include restlessness, irritability, depression, anxiety or an inability to enjoy your life.

Once you have recognised that you are experiencing stress, try to identify and address the underlying causes.

Sort the possible reasons into those with a practical solution, those that will get better anyway given time and those you can't do anything about.

Take control by taking small steps towards the things you can improve.

Set yourself realistic expectations and if you feel overwhelmed, ask people to help with the tasks you have to do and say no to the things you cannot take on. Think about a plan to address the things that you can.

If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, seek professional help. Your GP may refer you for talking therapies/CBT.

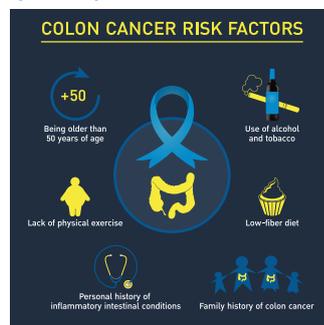
BOWEL CANCER AWARENESS

Bowel cancer is a disease that may start in the colon (large bowel) or back passage (rectum). It is also known as colorectal cancer. Cancers can also occur in the small bowel.

It's the third most common cancer in men and women in the UK.

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- **Age:** more than 94% of new cases are diagnosed in people over the age of 50 and nearly 60% are diagnosed in people aged 70 or over. However, bowel cancer can affect anyone of any age. More than 2,500 new cases are diagnosed each year in people under the age of 50
- **Genetics and family history:** those with a parent, brother/sister, son/daughter diagnosed with bowel cancer are more than doubly at risk
- **Diet and lifestyle:** 13% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by eating processed meat and the risk is increased by eating red meat. 11% of bowel cancer cases in the UK are caused by being overweight and obese, 6% by drinking alcohol and 7% by smoking. 5% of cases are caused by too little physical activity and 28% by eating too little fibre
- **Medical conditions:** Bowel cancer risk is higher in people with type-2 diabetes and those with inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative or Crohn's colitis), familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or Lynch syndrome.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms can include:



- Bleeding from the back passage (rectum) and/or blood in your poo
- A lump your doctor can feel in your back passage or abdomen
- A change in your normal bowel habit

- A feeling of needing to strain in your back passage (as if you need to poo), even after opening your bowels
- Losing weight
- Pain in your abdomen or back passage
- Tiredness and breathlessness.

See your doctor if you notice a change that isn't normal for you or if you have any of the possible signs and symptoms of cancer.

HOW IS IT DETECTED?

Detecting bowel cancer before symptoms appear means it is easier to treat and there is a better chance of survival.

A new improved home test kit for screening is now available called a FIT test, which is used to detect and quantify the amount of human blood in a single stool sample. An abnormal result requires further investigation.

The FIT test is easy!

- It only needs a single sample
- It's more sensitive so detects abnormalities more easily
- No need for repeat tests.

Bowel cancer screening is about to be offered for those in England aged 50 years plus soon in line with Scotland and Wales 50 to 74 years.

Sources: Allergy UK, Stress Management Society, NHS Choices, Bowel Cancer UK