

Patient Information Leaflet: A guide to what will happen now that your doctor has referred you to the Colorectal (Bowel) Team

1. Your Referral for Bowel Symptoms

Your doctor (GP) believes that you may have a problem with your bowels and has referred you to the hospital for further tests. Bowel symptoms are very common and there are many possible causes, most of which are not serious. However, it is important to rule out serious causes such as bowel cancer so that treatment can be started as soon as possible to achieve the best outcome. This leaflet answers some of the questions you might have about your referral to the hospital for bowel problems. It will also explain what to expect when you are contacted by the Colorectal Team.

2. What will happen now?

Your doctor has referred you to the **Colorectal Team** at your local hospital.

1. The first thing you must do is complete the FIT (Faecal Immunochemical Test) your GP should have given / sent to you AS SOON AS POSSIBLE – if you haven't been given or sent a FIT please request one from your GP surgery.
 - a. A FIT is used to collect a small sample of poo. The test comes with instructions you need to follow carefully.
 - b. Return the completed test to your GP surgery as soon as possible (within practice opening hours).
 - c. The sample will be sent off to be analysed/checked.
 - d. The result of the FIT will help the Colorectal Team to organise the most appropriate further test for you.
2. You will receive a phone call from the Colorectal Team. Please be ready for this call and be aware that it may show as an unknown number. Do not worry if you miss the call – they will ring you back and will follow up with a letter if they don't get hold of you on the telephone.
3. Following this initial phone call from the Colorectal Team, the next step will be either:
 - a. a Telephone Assessment Call with a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) for which you do not need to travel to hospital OR
 - b. an invitation to an Outpatient Assessment, where you will be assessed in person at the hospital by a specialist nurse or doctor.
 - c. You may be contacted by the hospital 'booking team' to arrange appointments

If you have a Telephone Assessment Call you will be asked questions about your health and symptoms. You will then be advised what tests you need to have. The Colorectal Team will also talk to you about what they think might be causing your symptoms. You will then be given an appointment for any required tests.

At any point during this process you can contact the Colorectal Team based at the hospital. When the Colorectal Team calls they will give you the number you can call them back on if you need to. They are there to support you and answer any questions that you might have. If nobody has contacted you from the hospital within 5 working days, please call your GP surgery and ask them to check that the referral has been processed.

Whilst waiting for your appointment, it is recommended that you try to continue with your normal activities/exercise. If further treatment is required, an important part of your treatment will be to optimise your fitness – such as stopping smoking and improving activity levels.

3. Preparation For Telephone Assessment Call or Outpatient Assessment

It is helpful to the Colorectal Team for you to think about your symptoms carefully before your Telephone Assessment Call or Outpatient Assessment. At your assessment, you are likely to be asked the following questions by the Colorectal Team. You may find it helpful to think about these questions beforehand and make some notes of your answers.

Your symptoms:

- What unusual bowel symptoms have you noticed and how long have you had them?
- Are they continuous or do they come and go?
- Is there a pattern? e.g. same time of day, before or after meals etc. Is it different depending on which foods you eat?

Change in your lifestyle:

- Have you changed your diet or exercise?
- Have you recently felt stressed?
- Have you been overseas recently?
- Have your friends, family or colleagues had similar problems?

Your medical history:

- Have you had any bowel or digestive problems in the past?
- Have you had any operations?
- Have you ever had any heart conditions?
- Do you take any blood thinning medicines?
- Are you diabetic? If so, do you take tablets or Insulin?
- Please have a list of medications you are taking, both prescribed by your doctor and/or any over the counter medications.

Family medical history:

- Have any of your family members had cancer, especially bowel cancer?
- Have any of your family members had a bowel disorder e.g. Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis?

Your personal circumstances

- Do you live alone? What support do you have?
- How mobile are you? Do you need help getting around?
- Is there anything else that you think it is important to share?

Finally, remember

Most people with bowel symptoms **don't** have cancer. **Only around 1 person out of 25 referred with bowel symptoms will be diagnosed with cancer.** However, it is important to have your symptoms checked to rule it out. If you would like more information about urgent referrals, please visit: www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-symptoms/what-is-an-urgent-referral.

Completing the FIT is a really important part of this process, so please do make sure you complete the test and return it to your GP surgery as soon as possible

You can talk to your Colorectal Team when they call you and they will be happy to help and support you. They will give you their number to call if you have any further questions.

This information can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print, and may be available in alternative languages, upon request. Please contact the team by email on: greatermanchester.cancer@nhs.net, by telephone on: 0161 918 2087.