

## I have blood in my stools (poo) - Do I have cancer?

How many people who have blood in their stools (poo) have cancer?

There have been two research studies done, looking at thousands of people to work out how many people with a certain symptom are likely to have cancer. If you have blood in your poo or on the toilet paper, then you should make an appointment and mention this to your GP. The chances are it's not cancer but you need to let your GP know. It may be embarrassing to talk about it to your doctor but it won't take long and it will put your mind at rest.

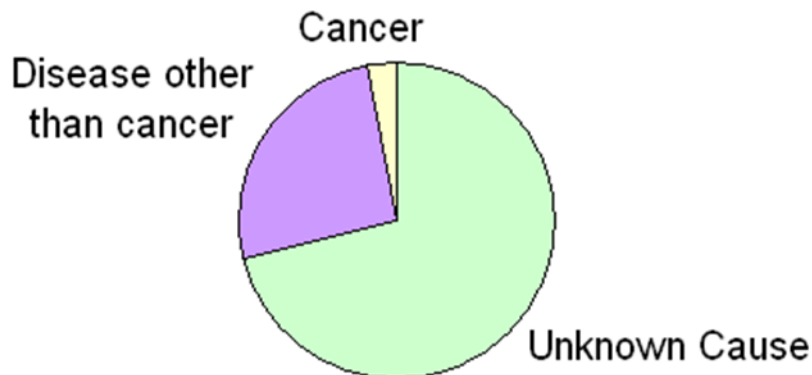
So just how many people who have blood in their stools have cancer? Not many!

	Cause of blood in stool not known*	Blood in stool caused by a disease other than cancer	Blood in stool caused by cancer
Percentage of Cases	71 %	26 %	3 %
Actual Number of People studied (15, 289 in total)	10,855	3,975	459

\* At 3 years from first reporting the symptom (diagnoses of cancer were most often made in the first three months after visiting the GP)

The information in the table above can also be shown using a pie chart.

### Causes of blood in stools



### Data from:

Jones et al BMJ "*Alarm symptoms in early diagnosis of cancer in primary care cohort study using general practice research database*" (May 2007)

Jones et al BMJ "*Alarm symptoms and identification of non-cancer diagnoses in primary care: cohort study*" (August 2009)

## So what does this all mean?

Well, the researchers that carried out this study used something called the “UK General Practice Research Database”. They got their information from 128 GP practices in England (we don’t know which practices they looked at for reasons of confidentiality) and looked at the records from December 2000 to January 1994. They looked at how many people, in those 128 GP surgeries had visited their doctor because they had blood in their stool, they then followed the records for three years to find out what happened to them.

In total they found that 15,289 people went to their doctor because they had blood in their stool, most of these people (about 71 %) never found out the reason why this happened to them. For about a quarter of people (about 26 %), this symptom was caused by a disease other than cancer. Only a very small number of people with blood in their stool were diagnosed with cancer, less than 3 %. Almost all the people diagnosed with cancer, were diagnosed quickly, within the first 3 months of their visit to the doctor.

## Apart from cancer, what else causes blood in your stools?

Lots of things, which is why it is important to see your GP. Most people with blood in their stools were found to have [haemorrhoids](#) (piles) a few were diagnosed with [diverticulitis](#) (swollen pockets in the lower part of your tummy (abdomen)). The older you are, the more likely you are to develop cancer (as your cells have had longer to get damaged) so if you are over 50 and have noticed blood when you go to the toilet, please tell your GP.

There are lots of other reasons for this symptom, far too many to mention here. It is a common problem, from the numbers above you can see that about 120 people visited each GP practice after noticing blood in their stools, so it is not uncommon.

## I can’t tell my doctor about this, it’s too embarrassing!

It is embarrassing, but your GP will be used to dealing with this sort of thing. Actually getting in the door and telling your doctor is the worst part. Doctors spend years at medical school learning a whole different language, don’t worry if you don’t know all the correct technical terms, your doctor will be able to figure it out. There are websites that help you say difficult words <http://www.howjsay.com> is a good one.

- [Urine](#) is the posh (medical) word for pee, piss, widdle, waz or a number one.
- [Stool](#) is the posh (medical) word for poop, pooh, turd, shit or a number two.
- Passing urine means having a pee/piss/widdle.
- A bowel movement means having a poo/shit/turd.
- Diarrhoea means “the runs” or “the skits”
- Constipation means you can’t poo or you’re “blocked up”.

Even knowing all this, it is still not easy to bring this up with your doctor, below is an example of a conversation you could have with your GP. Practice it at home first and don’t chicken out, say it as soon as you go in, don’t leave it until the end of the appointment!

## A sample conversation

**GP:** Hello, how are you?

**You:** Fine thanks. *(Everyone says this, you wouldn't be at the doctors if you are fine!)*

**GP:** What can I do for you today?

**You:** Well, actually, this is quite embarrassing...

**GP:** Go, on

**You:** I've noticed some blood in my stools/on the toilet paper

If you are worried it might be cancer then you are far better to ask this question outright than go away worrying about it.

**You:** My father/brother/mother/sister/friend had \_\_\_\_\_ (type of cancer), I am worried that this might be cancer.

There, that's the worst bit over and done with. Your doctor will probably ask you a few questions, so if it helps have a think about them before you go in.

### Questions your doctor might ask

- When did it start (last week, last month?) \_\_\_\_\_
- Is it painful? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are you feeling well otherwise? \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions you can ask your doctor

- Do I need any tests? \_\_\_\_\_
- When should I come back? \_\_\_\_\_
- How do I get my test results? Do I phone? If so, when should I phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

- How long will the results take? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do I need to see a specialist? \_\_\_\_\_

### What if I don't think my GP is taking this seriously?

Go back, doctors aren't mind readers, if it is still a problem, make another appointment. It helps if you can see the same GP again. If you still feel like you are getting no where, make an appointment with a different GP and get a second opinion, remember doctors are human too, you might just have caught them on a [bad day](#). The Cancer Research UK website has more information on the NICE guidelines and what you should expect called "[Should I see a bowel cancer specialist?](#)" If you still aren't getting anywhere you could contact the [Patient Advice and Liaison Service](#) (PALS) or ask at your GP reception for a comment form.

Remember, when doctors looked at more than 15, 000 people with blood in their stools less than 500 of those people had bowel cancer.

## Related information on this website

[Bowel/Colon Cancer – Is it common?](#)

[Bowel/Colon cancer in the family – Is it Genetic?](#)

## Online Links - Full Web Address for further information

- <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/334/7602/1040>
- [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/339/aug13\\_2/b3094](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/339/aug13_2/b3094)
- [http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact\\_sheets/html/Haemorrhoids.html](http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/html/Haemorrhoids.html)
- <http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/digestivehealth/diverticulitis.htm>
- <http://www.howjsay.com>
- <http://www.howjsay.com/index.php?word=urine&submit=Submit>
- <http://www.howjsay.com/index.php?word=stool&submit=Submit>
- [http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/talking\\_to\\_your\\_doctor/gp\\_badday.shtml#solutions](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/talking_to_your_doctor/gp_badday.shtml#solutions)
- <http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk/help/default.asp?page=5463>
- <http://www.pals.nhs.uk/>
- <http://understandingcancer.co.uk/2008/12/12/bowel-colon-cancer-is-it-common/>
- <http://understandingcancer.co.uk/2008/11/04/bowel-cancer-in-the-family-is-it-genetic/>
- 

### Notes

**Understanding Cancer Ltd are based in the North East of Scotland. We offer courses and tutorials on cancer to the general public and to healthcare professionals.**

Understanding Cancer courses are designed and delivered by Avril Morrison a research scientist with a PhD in Cell Biology. Avril has worked for the Association for Cancer Research and the American Institute for Cancer Research on breast cancer,

leukaemia and Wilm's tumour. Visit <http://understandingcancer.co.uk> for more information.

Other leaflets are available in this series including "What is a normal blood count" and "I have blood in my urine" please see <http://understandingcancer.co.uk> for further information.

Please see online for terms of use, disclaimer and copyright information.