# Rise in colon cancer among under-50s accelerates globally, prompting calls for earlier screening and lifestyle changes



A troubling global health trend is emerging: a notable rise in colon cancer, also known as bowel cancer, among younger adults under the age of 50. A recent large-scale analysis conducted by British scientists involving 42 countries has identified colon cancer as distinctively increasing in this age group, a pattern not observed with other cancers. This surge contrasts with trends in older adults, where the incidence of bowel cancer is either stabilising or declining in many regions.

The study highlighted that other cancer types such as thyroid, breast, and kidney cancers showed no significant difference in incidence rates between younger and older adults. Additionally, cancers like liver and stomach have actually decreased among those under 50 in over half of the studied countries. However, bowel cancer stood out as the only cancer consistently increasing in younger adults, with more than two-thirds of the countries experiencing a faster rise in younger populations compared to those over 50.

The findings underscore the unusual nature of this trend. For example, in England, diagnoses of bowel cancer in 25 to 49-year-olds have increased by over 50% since the early 1990s, while in the United States, projections suggest that colorectal cancer could become the most common cancer in people under 50 by 2030. Experts suggest that the difference may partly be due to routine screening programs targeted at older adults, which not only detect cancers earlier but also prevent cancer by removing pre-malignant lesions. Younger adults generally have less exposure to such early detection measures, potentially contributing to later-stage diagnoses.

Further complicating the picture, researchers have proposed several possible explanations for the rise, including lifestyle factors such as obesity, diets rich in ultra-processed foods, and even antibiotic use. The lead author of the study, Professor Amy Berrington from the Institute of Cancer Research in London, acknowledged the possibility that obesity could be a significant driver behind the increasing incidence but noted that evidence remains unclear and further investigation is ongoing. The study, published in the journal Annals of Internal Medicine, calls for additional research to explore possible novel carcinogens behind this rise.

Supporting these findings, a study published in The Lancet Oncology confirms a global surge in early-onset colorectal cancer across North America, Europe, Asia, and South America. It found rising incidence rates in young adults in more than half the countries examined, while rates in those over 50 appeared stable or decreasing. This data emphasizes the necessity for increased awareness and preventive efforts aimed specifically at younger populations.

In the United States, reports from the American Cancer Society highlight that by 2020, around 12% of colorectal cancer cases occurred in individuals under 50, reflecting a steady rise since the mid-1980s in those aged 20-39 and since the mid-1990s in those aged 40-54. This trend has prompted calls for enhanced prevention strategies and early detection, given that younger patients often present with more advanced disease.

The growing incidence has also prompted discussion about screening guidelines. Traditionally, screening has targeted adults aged 50 and over; however, research indicates that approximately one in seven colon cancer patients is now under 50. This demographic shift raises concerns since younger patients frequently present with more aggressive disease requiring intensive treatment. Some experts advocate reconsidering the age at which routine screening begins to catch these cases earlier.

In terms of symptoms, individuals should be vigilant for changes in bowel habits, such as persistent diarrhoea or constipation, blood in the stool, stomach pain or bloating, unexpected weight loss, and unusual fatigue. Awareness of these signs is critical for timely medical consultation and diagnosis.

With around 44,000 new bowel cancer cases annually in the UK and 142,000 in the US, it remains a significant health issue. Cancer Research UK estimates that over half of these cases in the UK could be prevented with lifestyle changes, spotlighting the importance of public health measures alongside medical research in confronting this alarming rise in younger adults.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/12/241211190108.htm), [[6]](https://www.onedaymd.com/2024/12/colon-cancer-diagnoses-in-young-people.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ama-assn.org/public-health/chronic-diseases/colon-cancer-becoming-more-common-people-under-50), [[5]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/colon-cancer-rates-rising-in-people-under-50/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/117/10/2146/8277395)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/12/241211190108.htm), [[6]](https://www.onedaymd.com/2024/12/colon-cancer-diagnoses-in-young-people.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html), [[2]](https://www.ama-assn.org/public-health/chronic-diseases/colon-cancer-becoming-more-common-people-under-50), [[4]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/colon-cancer-rates-rising-in-people-under-50/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/colon-cancer-rates-rising-in-people-under-50/), [[5]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-15208783/Colon-cancer-rising-young-people-study-global.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ama-assn.org/public-health/chronic-diseases/colon-cancer-becoming-more-common-people-under-50> - A study by the American Medical Association reveals that colorectal cancer rates are increasing among individuals under 50. The incidence has risen by approximately 2% annually in this age group, while the death rate has increased by 1% per year. Experts suggest that factors such as obesity, decreased physical activity, and changes in gut bacteria may contribute to this trend. The study also highlights the effectiveness of regular screening in older adults, which may not be as prevalent in younger populations, potentially leading to later-stage diagnoses in younger patients.
3. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/12/241211190108.htm> - Research published in The Lancet Oncology indicates a global surge in early-onset colorectal cancer cases. The study found that in 27 of 50 countries, including the United States, rates are increasing in young adults while stabilising in those aged 50 and older. This trend is observed across various regions, including North America, Europe, and parts of Asia and South America. The findings underscore the need for heightened awareness and preventive measures targeting younger populations to address this concerning rise in colorectal cancer incidence.
4. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/colon-cancer-rates-rising-in-people-under-50/> - An analysis by CBS News highlights the rising incidence of colon cancer among individuals under 50. The study found that one in seven colon cancer patients is under 50, challenging the traditional screening age of 50. Younger patients often present with more advanced stages of the disease, leading to more aggressive treatments. The findings suggest a need for increased awareness and potential adjustments to screening guidelines to address this emerging trend in younger adults.
5. <https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-rise-in-younger-adults.html> - The American Cancer Society reports a concerning increase in colorectal cancer rates among younger adults. Data indicates that in 2020, 12% of colorectal cancer cases were diagnosed in individuals under 50, approximately 18,000 cases. Rates have been rising since the mid-1980s in adults aged 20-39 and since the mid-1990s in those aged 40-54, with younger age groups experiencing the steepest increase. The report calls for enhanced prevention, early detection, and research efforts to address this alarming trend.
6. <https://www.onedaymd.com/2024/12/colon-cancer-diagnoses-in-young-people.html> - A study published in The Lancet Oncology documents rising rates of early-onset colorectal cancer across various countries. The research found that during the five-year period from 2013 to 2017, colon cancer rates in young people increased in 27 of 50 countries examined. This trend is not limited to high-income Western countries but also affects regions in South America and Asia. The study highlights the need for global attention to this emerging health issue and calls for further research into potential contributing factors.
7. <https://academic.oup.com/jnci/article/117/10/2146/8277395> - An article in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute presents evidence of rising colon cancer incidence rates among individuals under 50 in multiple countries. The study quantifies the estimated annual percentage change in colon cancer incidence during the most recent ten-year diagnostic period in 50 countries worldwide. The findings suggest that the 'early-onset' phenomenon may be linked to increasing risk factors among recently born generations, highlighting the need for further investigation into the causes of this trend.