- Colorectal cancer

Health & Lifestyle

Bowel cancer warning signs to look out for...

The earlier it's diagnosed, the more treatable and curable it is. By **CAMILLA FOSTER**

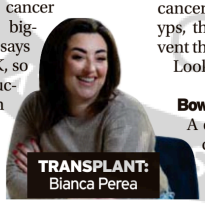


ALERT: Stomach pains and fatigue are common signs. An at-home test can help with early diagnosis

THE UK's first liver transplant for advanced bowel cancer has been hailed a success.

Bianca Perea, a 32-year-old trainee lawyer from Manchester, has been declared cancer-free after undergoing the procedure alongside other treatments such as targeted drug therapy and chemotherapy.

Bowel cancer is the UK's fourth most common cancer and the second biggest cancer killer, says Bowel Cancer UK, so this transplant success story is an exciting breakthrough for treating the disease.



TRANSPLANT: Bianca Perea

What is bowel cancer?

"Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, affects the large bowel, which is made up of the colon and rectum," explains Dr Lisa Wilde, director of research, policy, and influencing at Bowel Cancer UK. "Most bowel cancers develop from pre-cancerous growths, called polyps. But not all polyps develop into cancer. If your doctor finds any polyps, they can remove them to prevent them becoming cancerous."

Look out for these symptoms...

Bowel changes

A change in your pooing habits could be a warning sign. "You might be going more or less often, or have diarrhoea or constipation that might come and go," says Dr Wilde.

Blood

"One of the most recognisable symptoms to look out for is blood in your poo or bleeding from your bottom," says Lindsay Easton, CEO of Bowel Research UK. "This can be a sign of a less serious condition, but it's best to get this checked out with your GP as soon as you can."

A pain or lump in your stomach

"A pain or lump in your tummy is a symptom," says Dr Wilde.

Weight loss

Losing weight when you are not trying is also common. "This may because of reduced appetite, but not always. Some people lose weight even when they are eating normally," explains Dr Angela Rai, GP at The London General Practice. "This is called cachexia, and the body may not be absorbing the protein, fat and carbohydrate from the food you eat."

Unexplained tiredness

Feeling constantly tired and not knowing why is also a symptom.

"There are many causes of fatigue and this should be investigated," says Dr Rai. "Bowel cancer can cause anaemia, and the lack of healthy red cells causes fatigue."

When should you see a GP?

"If you have any of the above symptoms, or if your pooing habits just don't feel normal for you, our advice is to contact your GP straight away," says Dr Wilde. "They will want to give you an at-home test to help decide whether your symptoms need further investigation."

When should you get urgent help?

"The NHS advises people to call 111 if your poo is black or dark red or you have bloody diarrhoea, and to go to A&E or call 999 if you're bleeding non-stop from your bottom and there's a lot of blood," says Lindsay.

How important are home tests?

"We encourage anyone eligible for screening to take part because early diagnosis is so important," says Lindsay.