The Colorectal (bowel) Family History Clinic

Information for patients
Endoscopy
What does the Colorectal Family History Clinic provide?

The Family History Clinic provides a chance for you to talk about your family medical background, in particular those members of the family who may have had colorectal (bowel) cancer. It is important to know how this might affect you because it could increase your risk of getting bowel cancer.

Bowel cancer is a common disease affecting about 30,000 people per year; therefore many families will have members who have had bowel cancer. The importance of your family history increases depending on the number of relatives affected, the age at which they had cancer and their relationship to you.

Why have I been referred to the Family History Clinic?

You have been referred because your GP or hospital consultant has seen that members of your family have had bowel cancer. This does not always mean that you have a higher risk of getting bowel cancer. It is however advisable that further assessment of your family history is undertaken.

Where do I go and when is the clinic held?

Out Patient Department 1,
B Floor Huntsman Building,
Northern General Hospital

On arrival for your appointment, you should go to the reception area in this department.

The clinic is normally held on a Wednesday afternoon and is managed by a Family History Nurse Specialist.
How often do I need to attend?

You may only need to attend the clinic once. Further visits to the hospital will depend on your family history and if any tests need to be undertaken. Your first clinic appointment is very important, as this is when your family history information will be discussed.

Do I need to bring anything with me?

It would be helpful if you could bring as much information as possible about the members of your family who have had bowel cancer (such as ages, type of cancers). Details of other family members who are having screening can also be very helpful in assessing your risk. Obviously these are very sensitive issues for you and your family and we therefore understand if information is unavailable.

Who do I contact if I can’t attend?

If you know that you will be unable to attend your clinic appointment, please ring the Surgical Outpatient Department on telephone number 0114 271 4136 to make alternative arrangements. Please give as much notice of cancellation as possible so that the clinic appointment can be used for another patient.

What are the benefits of the clinic?

This will depend on the information that you are able to bring to the clinic. The more details that you have about the medical history of your family; the easier it will be to give the right advice.

We are not allowed to check the medical records of your family members due to patient confidentiality.

The aim is to assess your risk and give you the correct advice with regards to screening. We will also give you information about how to reduce your cancer risk through diet and lifestyle.
What will happen if I am assessed as being at an increased risk of developing bowel cancer?

All our advice is based on the North Trent Clinical Genetics Guidelines. These help us to work out who is in a low, moderate or high-risk group.

- **Low Risk** - if you are low risk it is likely that no further action will be needed.
- **Moderate Risk** - if you are moderate risk it is likely that we would recommend a test called colonoscopy, which is a camera test of the large bowel. This may be undertaken as a ‘one-off’ test. However, you may need to have a repeat colonoscopy later on in your life depending on your age and assessed risk.
- **High Risk** - If you are assessed as high risk we would recommend a test called a colonoscopy, which is a camera test of the large bowel. Depending on your age, you may need to have this repeated every few years. We may also want to refer you to the Clinical Genetics Service based here at the Northern General Hospital in order that they can talk to you about genetic testing (a blood test).

What does a colonoscopy examination involve?

You will be given a separate information booklet about this examination. Please ask if you have not been given this booklet.

What are the benefits and risks of a colonoscopy?

The benefits of having a colonoscopy is that your bowel can be examined for signs of cancer or polyps. Polyps are growths on the bowel wall, which are often harmless. However, some polyps can grow over many years and change into cancer. If you are found to have polyps we will normally be able to remove them, which might help to prevent you developing bowel cancer in the future. If you are found to have cancer we will start giving you the correct treatment without delay.
The main risks of having a colonoscopy are perforation (making a hole in the bowel wall) or bleeding. The chance of this happening is approximately 1 in 1000, although the risks are increased if polyps are removed. In the unlikely event that a problem occurs you may be kept in hospital and may require an operation to repair any damage to the bowel.

Please feel free to talk to the doctor / nurse who performs the test about the risks involved.

**Are there any alternatives to a colonoscopy?**

Yes. If you have other major medical problems or refuse a colonoscopy, we will arrange a different test called a barium enema to look at your bowel. This is a special type of x-ray. This will enable us to find big polyps or cancer in the bowel. However, a barium enema does not always find small polyps. It also does not allow the polyps to be removed. Therefore we think colonoscopy is the best test for family history screening.

**How long will I have to wait for the results of my colonoscopy?**

The doctor / nurse will be able to give you some idea of the results as soon as the test is over. If any biopsies (tiny pieces of bowel tissue) or polyps have been taken, these will be sent to the laboratories to be examined.

This generally takes 7-10 days. The results of the biopsies will then be reviewed and you will be contacted (usually by letter) and follow up information will be confirmed. It may be that no further action is necessary and you will then be discharged from the Family History Clinic.
What will happen if a polyp has been found?

Depending on the size and number of polyps, you may require a further colonoscopy in 1-5 year’s time to ensure you have not grown further polyps. On very rare occasions you may need a repeat test sooner than this.

How will this affect other members of my family?

You will be told if the results of your colonoscopy have meaning for other members of your family. You may want to discuss this with other family members. If they decide to seek advice, they must visit their own GP who will refer them on to the Family History Clinic if it is appropriate.

Contact details

For general appointment enquiries or to change an appointment for the Family History Clinic please contact:

The Surgical Outpatients Department,
Northern General Hospital on 0114 271 4136
between 9.00am and 4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like more specific information about the clinic or your family history, please contact the GI Nurse Practitioner on:

0114 271 5776
from 8.00am - 4.00pm, Monday to Friday

or leave a message on the answer machine instead. Please include your name and telephone number in order that we can return your call.