

# Bowel cancer on rise among young

The Times February 13th 20119



Processed meats are one factor contributing to soaring rates of bowel cancer in young Scots

Binge-drinking, poor diet and processed meats are contributing to soaring rates of bowel cancer in young Scots, experts have warned.

Children as young as ten are being diagnosed with the disease, while rates have doubled among people in their 20s and reached a record high among people aged 30 to 34. People born after 1996, the so-called Gen Z, have seen a rise in diagnoses.

Low fibre diets, obesity, type 2 diabetes, a lack of exercise, excess alcohol, increasing rates of inflammatory bowel disease, and diets high in red and processed meats such as bacon and salami are among the reasons thought to be behind the rise.

Just one child was diagnosed with bowel cancer in the 20 years to 2012, but researchers recorded eight cases in the next four years. Diagnoses among 15 to 19 year olds rose from 11 cases to 32 cases in the same timescale. Professor Bob Steele, chair of the UK National Screening Committee, said the numbers were not large enough to justify routine screening but were worthy of further research.

“We might do more harm than good by doing lots of colonoscopies as a result of false positive tests in young people,” he told *The Herald*.

Overall incidence is falling with a 15 per cent decline in the decade to 2016, but it rose among under-50s in a pattern that is being mirrored in the US, Europe, Australia and China.

Rebecca Siegal, of the American Cancer Society, said the risk of bowel cancer among millennials has “escalated back to the level of those born in the late 1800s”.

Deborah Alsina, chief executive of Bowel Cancer UK, said: “Younger people take longer to be diagnosed and often face delays, in some cases having to see their GP more than five times before being referred for crucial tests. On top of this 60 per cent are diagnosed at the later stages of the disease and around a third are diagnosed in emergency care when the chance of survival is lower.”

Professor Malcolm Dunlop, a specialist colorectal surgeon at Cancer Research UK, said cancer among the young was likely to be genetic or a result of inflammatory bowel disease, rather than environmental.

“In the last two years I’ve had four to or five young men with ulcerative colitis that have had more than one bowel cancer, and unfortunately the prognosis in those cases is not good.”

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