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A GUIDE FOR FAECAL IMMUNOCHEMICAL TEST (FIT) KIT

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer worldwide¹ and the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Singapore². Early screening, including a colonoscopy and the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) Kit, can go a long way in improving survival rates for patients.

For individuals above the age of 50, it is common to have polyps form on the inner walls of the colon and rectum. Most polyps are benign (not cancer), but some polyps (adenomas) can become cancer and thus, should be removed if detected. Colorectal polyps and cancers can be detected by traces of blood that may be imperceptible to the naked eye.

The FIT is an inexpensive and non-invasive screening method that can help detect such traces in the stool. It can also be done easily in the comfort of your own home.

Who should use the FIT kit?

The FIT kit is recommended for individuals over the age of 50 who do not have any signs or symptoms of colorectal cancer. This is as colorectal cancer displays no symptoms in the early stages and can only be detected by screening³. Individuals are encouraged to do the test once a year.

The proper usage of FIT kit

While using the FIT kit to collect stool samples may seem simple, a recent study⁴ has shown that one in ten

patients has returned stool specimens that cannot be processed in the laboratory. This may be due to patient-related errors such as not enough stool samples, incorrectly labelled samples, old samples, and broken or leaking containers⁵. By learning the proper usage of the FIT kit, it allows for more accurate and reliable testing.

How to use the FIT kit

Here are the recommended steps on using the FIT kit:

1. Collect your stool on clean pieces of toilet paper. Ensure that the stool does not come into contact with urine or water.

Do not collect a stool sample if you have any bleeding conditions such as haemorrhoids (pus) or menstruation.
2. Open the specimen bottle and take out the collection spoon.
3. Use the collection spoon to take samples from the insides and surfaces of the stool 6 times.
4. Return the collection spoon with the stool sample into the specimen bottle and screw the cap tightly.
5. Wrap the kit in bubble wrap before placing it into the biohazard bag provided. Return the specimen within the day of the test.

What to do if your result is positive

If the result comes back positive, it means that there is a presence of blood detected in your stool sample. It does not necessarily mean that you have colorectal cancer as there are possibilities of false-positive and false-negative results. Blood in the stool can also be caused by other medical conditions.

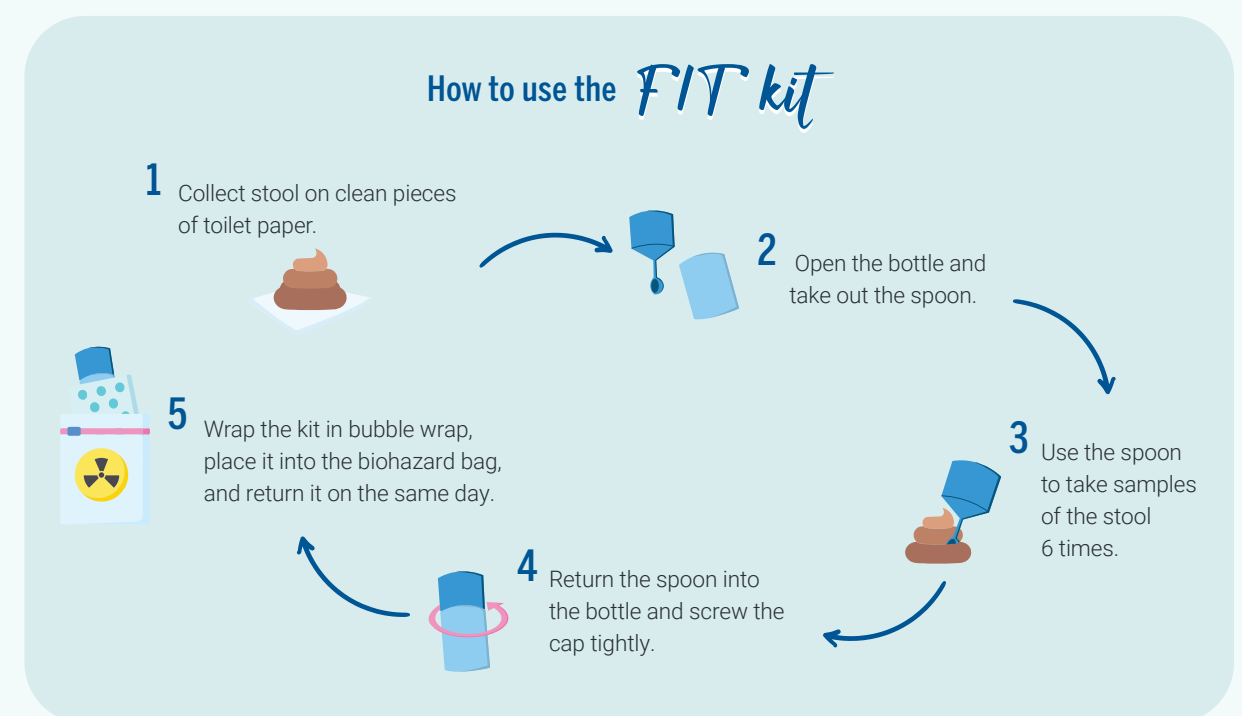
As such, it is highly recommended that you follow up with your healthcare provider and schedule an appointment for further evaluation.

Towards a better colorectal health

Early detection is paramount for those facing colorectal cancer. The FIT kit is an effective screening option for at-risk individuals as it provides an accessible means to detect any abnormalities early.

By incorporating FIT into routine screenings, individuals are on the right path to proactive health management and a hopeful future marked by colorectal wellness. ■

⁵Pozniak, Sarah. What At-Home Colon Cancer Tests Are Available, and How Reliable Are They? GoodRx Health, 2023.



¹"Colorectal cancer". World Health Organization, 2023.

²Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Report 2021.

³"Colon cancer: What you need to know". Parkway Cancer Centre, 2015.

⁴Liu, Po-Hong et. al. Unsatisfactory Fecal Immunochemical Tests for Colorectal Cancer Screening: Prevalence, Reasons, and Subsequent Testing. American Association for Cancer Research, 2023.



4 THINGS GEN ZS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER

Although colorectal cancer is known to predominantly affect older individuals¹, it does not mean that Gen Zs are immune to its risks. In fact, there is a growing concern about the increasing incidence of colorectal cancer in those younger than 50 globally².

The risk factors associated with colorectal cancer include genetics, obesity, overconsumption of processed and red meats, alcohol, and smoking. The rising incidence of colorectal cancer in younger individuals could thus be attributed to changes in our diet and lifestyle.

Many, however, have expressed doubts at the association between these factors and the increasing incidence of the disease. It is crucial to acknowledge that while these factors may elevate the risk, the incremental increase in risk is relatively small³.

Regardless of the reasons behind the increasing incidence of colorectal cancer, it certainly will not hurt for Gen Zs to take a proactive approach and learn more about the disease. Here are four things Gen Zs need to know about colorectal cancer.



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Dr Foo Kian Fong specialises in cancers that affect the gastrointestinal tract such as the oesophagus, stomach, pancreas, small and large intestines, neuroendocrine, biliary tract and anal canal. He also has interest in nasopharynx, lung, kidney and prostate cancers. He has published numerous articles on nasopharynx, lung, liver, stomach and colon cancers in peer reviewed journals.

1. Risk factors and lifestyle choices

Colorectal cancer usually starts with a polyp in the colon and over a period of time, due to changes in the gut milieu and genetic changes, it develops into a cancer.

The main risk factors include:

- Genetics related to a certain gene which can be transmitted from parent to child such as adenomatous polyposis and Lynch syndrome
- Personal history or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps
- Inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn Disease or Ulcerative Colitis
- Obesity
- Diabetes Mellitus
- Red and processed meats
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol
- Others

Understanding the risk factors associated with colorectal cancer is vital, as certain aspects can be mitigated through

¹"Colorectal Cancer". World Health Organization, 2023.

²"What's Driving the Rise of Colon Cancer in Young Adults?". ASCO Daily News, 2023.

³"Colorectal cancer is rising among younger adults and scientists are racing to uncover why". CNN, 2023.

lifestyle adjustments. Unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as constantly eating high fat fast food, is associated with an elevated risk of colorectal cancer.

Other manageable factors like cutting down on sugar⁴ and alcohol, consuming vegetables, dairy products and whole grains⁵, and leading a more physically active lifestyle, may also help reduce the risk of the consequential disease.

2. Symptoms to look out for

The symptoms of colorectal cancer include :

-  Change in bowel habits (diarrhoea or constipation)
-  Feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
-  Finding blood (either bright red or very dark) in your stool
-  Finding your stools are narrower than usual
-  Abdominal pain especially at night
-  Frequently having gas pains, cramps, or feeling full or bloated
-  Losing weight with no known reason
-  Feeling very tired all the time
-  Having nausea or vomiting

Most of these symptoms are common in younger people especially those with irritable bowel syndrome. If you experience any of these symptoms over a prolonged period and there are risk factors, do not hesitate to consult with your healthcare provider. However, it is important to note that these symptoms are usually not due to cancer.

Additionally, early cancer does not usually cause pain⁶. Therefore, anyone with these symptoms should see a doctor to be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

3. Screening tests

Screening for cancer is to do tests to detect colorectal cancer even when there are no symptoms.

In Singapore, the recommended age for screening is 50 years old for individuals with no symptoms⁷. In the USA, the age to start screening is now 45 years. Although these tests may be of little concern to Gen Zs, it is always good to be aware of

the options available. Moreover, early detection of colorectal cancer can improve the effectiveness of cancer treatments.

The following screening tests can be used to detect polyps, cancer, or other abnormalities⁸:

- **Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)** or **Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)** can detect tiny amounts of blood in the stool. If this test detects blood, other tests are needed to find the source of the blood. Benign conditions (such as haemorrhoids), can also cause blood in the stool.
- **Colonoscopy** allows your doctor to examine your rectum and entire colon using a long, lighted tube (colonoscope). If polyps — benign growths that may lead to cancer — are found, they may be removed.
- **Virtual colonoscopy** uses special X-ray equipment to produce pictures of the colon and rectum. A computer assembles these pictures into detailed images that can show polyps and other abnormalities.

4. Treatment options

While each case varies, surgery for colorectal cancer can be very successful even in advanced stages. Although most patients require surgery to excise the affected colon segment, some may need additional chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

For individuals with metastatic colorectal cancer, targeted therapy becomes a viable option in the comprehensive treatment plan.

Moving forward

As colorectal cancer is becoming more common among younger individuals, it is crucial for us to have a basic understanding of the disease. Knowing the risk factors, symptoms, screening tests, treatment options, and support is especially useful in the event that we may face a colorectal cancer diagnosis.

It is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which includes eating a plant-based diet, having regular exercise, and getting enough sleep (more than 6 hours a night) to hopefully prevent colorectal cancer. ■

⁴Hur J, Otegbeye E, Joh HK, et al. Sugar-sweetened beverage intake in adulthood and adolescence and risk of early-onset colorectal cancer among women. Gut. 2021.

⁵Vieira AR, Abar L, Chan DSM, et al. Foods and beverages and colorectal cancer risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis of cohort studies, an update of the evidence of the WCRF-AICR Continuous Update Project. Ann Oncol. 2017.

⁶"Colorectal Cancer", PCC.

⁷"Colorectal Cancer Screening: Why It's Important". SingHealth, 2021.



UNDERSTANDING FOOD LABELS

Eating well is just as important as exercising well. At a seminar session held last June in the Philippines, Principal Dietitian Gerard Wong explained the basics of reading and interpreting food labels to help us make more informed food choices when we eat.

“There is a strong link between obesity, physical activity and cancer in modernising countries”, shared Gerard. Addressing participants who attended the seminar on *Understanding Food Labels* in-person and online, he explained how an urban lifestyle, as well as the growing prevalence of fast food chains in Southeast Asia and around the world, can have an adverse impact on individuals’ dietary habits.

One way obesity is measured is using body mass index (BMI). However, it is important to note that BMI offers only a rough estimation of the amount of body fat by using height and weight measurements. While BMI can help assess risk factors for certain health conditions, it may not offer an accurate representation of body fat composition as it does not take into account muscle mass or the distribution of weight within the body.

Furthermore, there are ethnic differences in BMI between Asians and Caucasians, as Asians are found to have a higher body fat percentage compared to Caucasians, shared Gerard.

Beyond BMI, “weight is a balance of what we eat and what we burn,” he said.

All food has energy. Consuming more energy than you burn may lead to weight gain and obesity, increasing your risk for cancer and other chronic health problems.

Conversely, the loss of muscle mass and fibre due to ageing can affect this balance. In the case of cancer, an inability to eat due to side effects of treatment can also result in rapid weight loss.

Why read food labels

According to Gerard, moderating our energy intake through the food we consume is as equally important as exercise.

“With regards to weight loss, exercise is futile if we do not put a curb on the calories coming in,” he explained.

When it comes to weight gain or loss, it is important to incorporate lifestyle and dietary changes that can be sustained in the long-term. For example, instead of cutting out fast food completely or drastically reducing calories, you can choose healthier options in your food orders or make adjustments to how frequently you consume processed foods.

“Understanding food labels can help us make more informed food choices,” said Gerard.

How to read food labels

There are 3 key items on a food label to look out for when choosing foods:

- Ingredient List
- Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)
- Nutrient Claims

The **ingredient list** shows us all the ingredients used to make a food product. These ingredients are generally listed in descending order, by the amount of ingredients used to manufacture the food product. This can help give you an idea of how much a particular ingredient is used in the food product.

For example, if sugar is the first item listed, it tells you that sugar comprises the main ingredient component in the food product.

The **NIP** tells you the actual nutritional value of the food product. We should note that NIPs may be presented

differently, depending on whether the food label follows the United Kingdom (UK) system, or the United States (US) system.

UK food labels typically show the nutrition intake ‘per serving’ and ‘per 100 g’ (or ‘per 100 ml’ for liquids) of the food product. The ‘per 100 g’ listing helps you compare the nutritional content of two similar food products and choose the healthier option.

US food labels differ slightly. They generally highlight serving size, servings per container, calories per serving, and nutrients in terms of percent daily values (compared to grams on UK food labels). The list of nutrients are usually divided by nutrients to limit (e.g. fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates) and nutrients to get enough of (e.g. vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron).

Nutrient claims refer to content claims on food packaging that describe the level of nutrients in a food product. Typical terms used in nutrient claims include ‘free of –’, ‘high in –’, ‘low in –’, ‘more –’, ‘reduced –’ or ‘lite’. Depending on the country where the food products are sold, there are certain requirements (e.g. percentage of the daily allowance for the relevant nutrient) that need to be met before such nutrient claims can be made on food packaging.

Making positive shifts in mindset

Gerard wrapped up the seminar by sharing some examples of food labels of common foods that can be found at the supermarket.

He emphasised the importance of cutting down on sugar (including artificial sweeteners), saturated fats and trans fats, and sodium found in many common foods such as oil, sausages and potato chips, as they may contribute to weight gain, obesity, elevated cholesterol or blood sugar levels, and increased risk of chronic diseases. He also advised to be careful with labels that say ‘vegetable oil’ as they may include unhealthy oils such as palm oil or coconut oil.

Instead, increase fibre intake (e.g. switching to brown rice, consuming more vegetables) to help regulate bowel movements and reduce the risk of colon cancer, among other diseases. You can also opt for healthier oils (e.g. olive oil, sunflower oil) in your foods. Gradually reducing your sugar and sodium intake over time can also help you get used to any differences in taste.

Ultimately, eating well is about changing your perception of food and making positive mindset shifts to help you make long-term lifestyle changes for your health. ■

3 things to look out for on a Food Label

UK food label

Nutrition

Product 1	Per serving (45g)	Per 100g
Energy	639 kJ (153 Cal)	1419 kJ (340 Cal)
Protein	4.3g	9.5g
Fat, total	0.8g	1.7g
- saturated	0.2g	0.4g
Carbohydrate		
- total	28.6g	63.6g
- sugars	10.2g	22.7g
Fibre	6.4g	14.2g
Sodium	122mg	270mg
Potassium	324mg	721mg

INGREDIENTS: Cereals (64) (Whole wheat, wheat bran), sultanas (26), malt extraxt, sugar, minerals (iron, zinc oxide), salt, vitamins (niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, folate)

US food label

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container	
Serving Size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	

The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.
INGREDIENTS: WHOLE GRAIN WHEAT FLOUR, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, SUGAR, BLUEBERRY PUREE, CORN SYRUP, APPLE POWDER, SOLUBLE CORN FIBER, SOYBEAN OIL, MODIFIED CORNSTARCH, OAT FIBER, MODIFIED TAPIOCA STARCH, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED COTTONSEED OIL, RESISTANT CORN MALTODEXTRIN, CITRIC ACID, PECTIN, WHEY (FROM MILK), SALT, NATURAL FLAVOUR, BAKING SODA, SODIUM CITRATE, SOY LECITHIN, SODIUM BENZOATE ADDED TO PRESERVE FRESHNESS, VANILLIN (ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR), ARTIFICIAL COLOR (RED 40, BLUE 1)

1. Nutrition Information Panel (NIP)

2. Ingredient List

3. Nutrient Claims



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BSND (Australia), PGCert (Sports Nutrition) (Australia)

As a Principal Dietitian, Gerard addresses the needs of cancer patients through their cancer journey and conducts nutrition workshops both locally and overseas. He is currently an Accredited Dietitian with the Singapore Nutrition and Dietetics Association (SNDA).



CANHOPE SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

CanHOPE is dedicated to supporting, empowering, and inspiring cancer treatment journeys with hope by curating programmes that address our patients' and their caregivers' psycho-emotional, social, and physical needs. These programmes aim to engage our patients, foster a supportive community, and improve the quality of life in the treatment journey.

For many individuals facing the intricate challenges of cancer, CanHOPE is a significant pillar of support. CanHOPE frequently coordinates heartwarming support programmes for patients, survivors, and caregivers to share experiences, gain strength from one another, and find solace in a community that understands the unique challenges of their journey.

Holistic Wellness Workshops



1. Gyrokinesis: Harmonising mind and body

Gyrokinesis, a method of the Gyrotonic Expansion System®, is taught by our volunteer (known as CanFRIEND), who is a

certified instructor. By focusing on the mind-body connection, the technique aims to create physical, mental, and emotional stability through rhythmic, flowing movement sequences using a yoga mat or a stool.



2. Sound Healing Therapy: Regaining balance through vibrations

A CanFRIEND guided the participants into a meditative state by using singing bowls during the session. Attendees were induced into a state of relaxation, thereby re-tuning their bodies, and attaining a state of natural equilibrium for self-healing.



3. Chair Yoga, Meditation, and Singing Bowl Therapy

A serene trio of chair yoga, meditation, and bowl therapy taught by our CanFRIEND offered a comprehensive wellness experience. Participants, regardless of physical condition, reaped the rewards of breath-focused meditation, gentle chair yoga stretches, and the soothing sounds of Tibetan singing bowls.

Nutrition Talks & Workshops



1. Shakes & Dips: Nutrient-packed delights

The tailored in-house workshop, Shakes & Dips, was conducted by our dietitians who eagerly shared their knowledge of nutritious high-protein shakes and dips. Attendees learned the art of preparing nutrient-rich shakes using ingredients like Greek yoghurt, cottage cheese, nut-based milks, nuts, and seeds.



2. Juicing 101: Boosting health through liquid nutrition

Led by a juicing expert and our dietitian, the Juicing 101 workshop educated participants on the benefits of incorporating juices into their diet. The session covered various types of juices, suitable ingredients, and proper storage techniques.

Participants also enjoyed a live demonstration of crafting and tasting cold-pressed juices and smoothies, experiencing first-hand the positive impact it has on our immunity, gut health, energy levels, and mental clarity.

Creative Workshops



1. Zentangle: Embracing calm through art

The Zentangle workshop, facilitated by SLOW SoulSpace, introduced participants to the meditative art form which originates from the United States. Using simple elemental strokes, attendees created beautiful and unique images, regardless of prior art experience. Participants can look forward to embarking on a self-care journey with the Zentangle® Method by embracing creativity in their daily life.



2. Pastel Nagomi Art: Harmony, tranquillity, and peace

Listening Works conducted the Pastel Nagomi Art workshop, a healing art form from Japan that emphasises harmony, calm, and peace. Participants explored transparent, gentle, warm, and heart-touching art using pastels and their fingers.

CanHOPE's holistic support programmes

CanHOPE offers a diverse range of support programmes, nurturing the well-being of cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers. These programmes not only address physical health but also provide emotional and creative outlets, empowering individuals to navigate their cancer journey with resilience and hope.

Some of these support programmes would not be possible without the contribution of our CanFRIENDS, some of whom are cancer survivors themselves. The successful fruition of these programmes are attributed to our altruistic CanFRIENDS who willingly walk alongside us in delivering holistic care and support.

We look forward to welcoming new volunteers and valiant cancer warriors onboard to join us on this meaningful journey. Together, we hope to explore new programmes and touch the hearts and minds of those with cancer. ■



For more information on our support programmes, scan the QR code or visit <https://www.canhope.org/support-programmes>



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