

# Svit

*Saves Lives*



NATIONAL SCREENING  
AND EARLY DETECTION PROGRAMME  
FOR COLORECTAL CANCER

**It's time to think about yourself.**

# Colorectal cancer – a silent killer

**Around 1,600 people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer in Slovenia every year.** Unfortunately, many people die because of this cancer – because it is found too late. This type of cancer develops in the body over several years without any obvious symptoms; when noticeable problems finally appear, the disease is often already in a very advanced stage, which makes the treatment very difficult.

**Not only can colorectal cancer be completely cured, it can even be prevented if precancerous changes on the mucous membrane (polyps) are discovered and removed in time.**

Doctors with many years of experience abroad and in Slovenia show that the risk of colorectal cancer can be drastically reduced with **regular faecal occult blood tests**, which enable the detection and removal of polyps and the diagnosis of the disease in its initial phase when it is entirely curable.

Hence, the Svit Programme was initiated in Slovenia in 2009 to help men and women aged 50 to 74 years.

**Your participation in the Svit Programme is covered by your mandatory health insurance, since the costs for the implementation of this programme are covered by the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia.**

The programme is organised under the patronage of Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and implemented by the National Institute of Public Health.

***Regular testing can save  
your health and your life!***

**DO NOT THROW AWAY THE INVITATION – GET TESTED!**

**COLORECTAL CANCER IS A VERY COMMON AND A VERY INSIDIOUS DISEASE, WHICH CAN DEVELOP IN THE BODY OVER SEVERAL YEARS WITHOUT ANY OBVIOUS SYMPTOMS.**

Over the past few years, the Svit Programme has helped to detect polyps or the early stage of cancer in many people who had absolutely no idea they were ill. Such people are the best proof about the importance of the Svit Programme, which has saved many lives.

When I received the invitation to the Svit Programme, I hesitated for quite some time before I decided to participate. The test results were positive. They found blood in my stool! Today, I'm healthy. I have two children and had I not responded to the Svit Programme invitation, their lives would have been completely different today. Even if the test is somewhat unpleasant, it is really important to take it, otherwise it could be too late.



Marjan Gospič

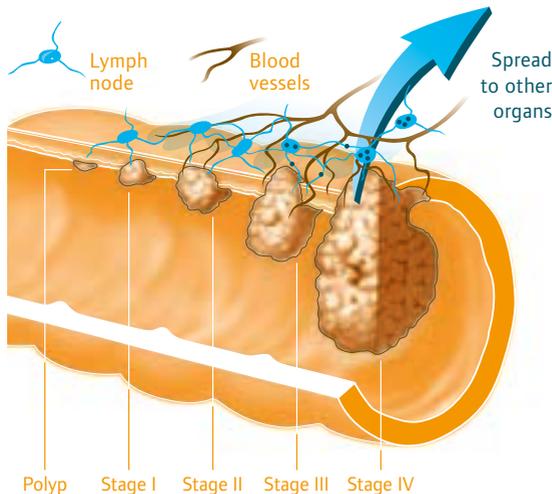


It is worth to make an effort for our health. Luckily, I'm healthy, but I take regular tests in the Svit Programme because I want to stay healthy. When we know the way to avoid a sneaky danger, it is only right to do it!

Viki Grošelj, alpinist

# The course of the disease

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women. This type of cancer is most frequently developed from precancerous changes on the mucous membrane, called the polyps. The cells of a polyp, which are harmless by themselves, can modify over the years, resulting in the development of cancer. The disease advances slowly and without any obvious symptoms. When cancer is still restricted to the polyp, it can easily be removed and oncologic treatment is often not even necessary. But if the disease advances and starts spreading in the body via the blood vessels and the lymph glands, the treatment can be very complex and, unfortunately, not always successful. This is why any changes in the large intestine must be found as soon as possible!



*The stages of colorectal cancer*

**The following factors increase the risk of colorectal cancer:** chronic inflammatory bowel disease, a family history of polyps, smoking, alcohol consumption, not enough exercise, unbalanced diet, obesity and overconsumption of red meat.

# Who is at most risk

The risk of developing colorectal cancer increases with age. A majority of patients are aged 50+, but, unfortunately, the disease can also affect younger people.

The following groups of people are at most risk:

- the closest blood relatives of patients who had colorectal cancer before the age of 60 years (if the father, mother, brother or sister were diagnosed with it),
- patients with chronic inflammatory bowel disease, and
- patients who have already had polyps in their bowel.

**SINCE ABNORMALITIES IN THE BODY DO NOT BLEED ALL THE TIME, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SVIT PROGRAMME EVERY TWO YEARS. THIS INCREASES THE CHANCES OF FINDING POSSIBLE BLEEDING IN TIME.**



When my mum found out that she had colorectal cancer, she immediately started intensive treatment, which lasted for two years. She also resorted to alternative medicine. However, it was too late. I lost my mum when I was 20. I believe that with a better lifestyle and an earlier screening, she could still be alive.



Katja Lihtenvalner

# How to join the Svit Programme

1. Fill in and sign the Statement of Voluntary Participation in the Svit Programme as soon as possible and send it to the Center Svit.
2. If you meet the criteria for participation in the screening programme, you will receive a test kit for two stool samples by post. Follow the instructions to collect two samples in the privacy of your home, and submit them at the post office in the enclosed envelope.
3. The Svit Programme's central laboratory will test the samples for faecal occult blood.
4. You will receive the test results within one week.

If we will find no blood in the stool samples, the results will be **negative**.

This means that there is probably nothing unusual going on in your colon – you will receive new invitation in two years and then again every two years until you turn 74 years of age. Unfortunately, no test is entirely reliable; therefore, you still need to carefully monitor your body functions, especially the movement of your bowel.

The Svit Programme saved my life because the employees of the programme never gave up; I will always be grateful for that. The time stood still after the colonoscopy and the diagnosis of cancer came using silent steps. After that, everything happened extremely fast: the hospital, the surgery, the results. I still hardly comprehend what has happened. I guess I was destined to avoid the worst-case scenario. Do not throw away the invitation and save your life!



# What are the signs of possible abnormalities in the colon

- Visible blood in the stool,
- Different bowel movements (very thin stool or constipation followed by diarrhoea, black stool),
- Severe or recurring abdominal pain, or
- Sudden loss of body weight.

**IF SUCH PROBLEMS APPEAR, YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY CONSULT YOUR GENERAL PRACTITIONER.**

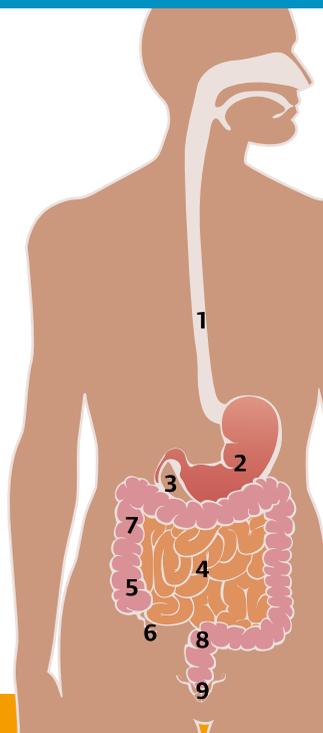
## What if blood is found in the stool samples

If the Svit Programme screening results are **positive**, it means that blood was found in the stool samples. This does not mean you have cancer – it only means there is blood in your colon and we must find out why.

A detailed examination of the large intestine, which will explain the cause of the bleeding, is called a colonoscopy.

**The cause of bleeding is usually one or several polyps** - the formations on the mucous membrane - that can eventually turn cancerous. Such polyps are considered time bombs and therefore need to be removed.

1 oesophagus; 2 stomach; 3 duodenum;  
4 small intestine; 5 caecum; 6 appendix;  
7 large intestine; 8 rectum; 9 anus

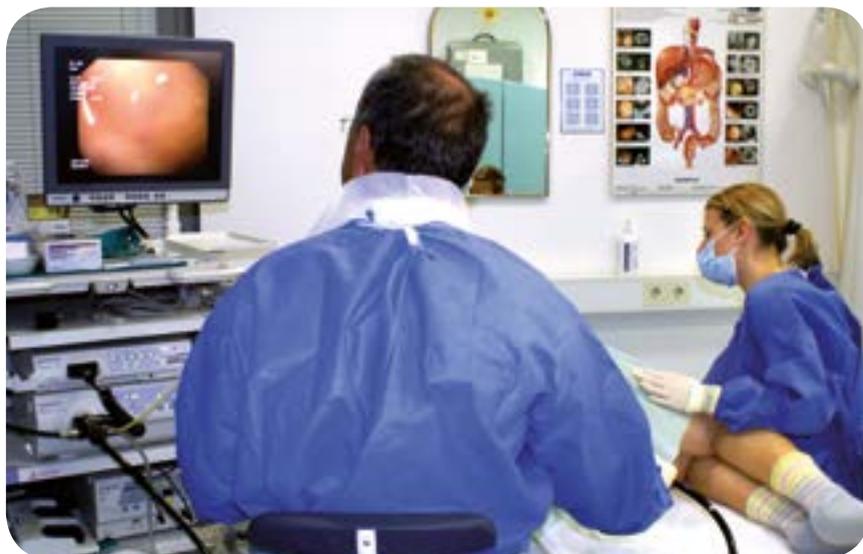


# The colonoscopy

The experience of the Svit Programme have so far shown that blood is found in stool samples of approximately 6 % of all people who joined the Svit Programme. We advise everyone who receives a positive result of the faecal occult blood test to undergo a colonoscopy within the Svit Programme. A colonoscopy is a procedure in which a specialist uses a flexible finger-thick tube with a small camera to examine the large intestine, which must be completely emptied before the examination. If any polyps are found, most of them can be removed during the procedure without any pain for the patient. The doctor sends the tissue samples for a detailed microscopic examination.

If the colonoscopy is needed, you will first visit your general practitioner. Together, you will make a plan of the examination, which is organized by the central unit of the Svit Programme for all its participants. You will call the Svit Programme call centre and set a date for examination in one of Svit's authorised colonoscopy centres, which are located throughout Slovenia. These diagnostic centres meet the strictest quality criteria for the performance of such examinations.

Colonoscopy is slightly unpleasant but painless for most people.



# What if it's cancer?

If the detailed examination shows the presence of cancerous formations in your colon, you will immediately start with the treatment, which will be monitored by top experts in the field of cancer treatment in cooperation with your general practitioner.

**Thanks to modern medical findings and treatment methods, colorectal cancer is completely curable if it is found early enough. The sooner, the better!**

**BEFORE THE SVIT PROGRAMME, ONLY 12 % OF COLORECTAL CANCER CASES WERE FOUND IN THE EARLY STAGES. IN THE SVIT PROGRAMME, MORE THAN 70 % OF CANCER CASES ARE FOUND SO EARLY THAT ONCOLOGICAL TREATMENT IS NOT EVEN NEEDED.**

**DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE WORLD INSIDE YOUR BODY! GET TESTED!**

Regular faecal occult blood tests are a very important investment in your health. It is, therefore, very important that you join the Svit Programme when you are invited.

Colonoscopy showed several large polyps in my colon. Without the screening programme, I wouldn't suspect anything and it would probably end badly. Thanks to this programme, I can now look to the future with a smile on my face. I hope my experience will encourage everyone who might hesitate to participate in the Svit Programme or to undergo colonoscopy. Do it and save your life!



# What can we do to avoid cancer in the first place

- Regularly participate in the Svit Programme and other screening programmes.
- Decide to lead a healthy lifestyle. Exercise a lot, keep a normal body weight and eat a healthy diet.
- Quit smoking, drinking alcohol and other harmful bad habits.
- Listen to your body and visit your general practitioner if you experience any problems with your colon.
- Encourage others to do the same.



*Thanks to the Svit Programme, I found out about my cancer and successfully beat it. I recommend everyone who receives the invitation to accept it! It doesn't take much effort to learn about your health. The preventive programme at hand is priceless.*

*Marija Lili Gričar*

Since we have had the Svit Programme in Slovenia, many cases of cancer have been found in the early stages. In such patients the surgeries are much less problematic and the prognosis is much better, therefore do not throw away the invitation, as it can save your life!

Chief Physician Franc Jelenc, M.D., PhD.,  
Head of the Clinical Department of Abdominal



# About the national screening and early detection programme for colorectal cancer in Slovenia

The Svit Programme is called the nationwide screening programme, as it detects early precancerous changes and thus decreases the probability of developing colorectal cancer and increases the survival rate of cancer patients.

The programme was enabled by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. The participation in the Svit Programme is covered by the mandatory health insurance. Invitations are sent to women and men aged 50 to 74. The Svit Programme screening test must be taken every two years until the age of 74.

The Svit Programme is a high-quality health service, which follows the recommendations of the European Commission and state-of-the-art findings as well as the experience of the most successful programmes for the early detection of colorectal cancer in the European Union and elsewhere in the world. The Svit Programme ensures high-quality services, from screening and diagnostic procedures to the treatment of cancer.

The invitations to the programme and faecal occult blood tests are sent out

every two years. The analyses of the stool samples are carried out in the Svit Programme central laboratory for the entire Slovenia. Participants and their general practitioners are regularly informed about the positive test results, while the negative test results are only sent to participants. Once a year, we inform general practitioners about their patients who participated in the programme.

Colonoscopies are performed by specially trained specialists in internal medicine – gastroenterologists and surgeons in specially organised centres throughout Slovenia. The removed tissues are examined by histopathologists. Treatment is carried out by specialists in various medical centres.

The expert quality of the Svit Programme is controlled by the programme board, which is composed of renowned specialists with various fields of expertise. The operator of the Svit Programme is the National Institute of Public Health who implements, manages and coordinates the programme, and the medical staff from various Slovenian health institutions cooperate in the implementation of the programme.

# For additional information about the Svit Programme, you can:

- call the Svit Programme Call Centre every day between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM on 01 620 45 21;
- send a letter to Program Svit, p. p. 241, 1001 Ljubljana, or an e-mail to [svit@nijz.si](mailto:svit@nijz.si) or a fax to 01 620 45 29;
- visit the Svit Programme website [www.program-svit.si](http://www.program-svit.si);
- visit the Svit contact point in the prevention centre of your community health centre, or
- visit your general practitioner.

We can send the material about the Svit Programme in the Italian or Hungarian language at your request. Spoken materials and materials in the Slovenian sign language are available at [www.program-svit.si](http://www.program-svit.si) where you can also find other interesting information.

We hope you have already decided to get tested in the Svit Programme. We kindly greet you in the hope you will make a wise decision about your health.

The Svit Programme staff



Nacionalni inštitut  
za javno zdravje



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