

IT IS TIME TO THINK OF YOURSELF

Svit 

SLOVENIAN NATIONAL
COLORECTAL CANCER
SCREENING PROGRAMME



PROGRAM

Svit
saves
lives

NIJZ National Institute
of **Public Health**

Colorectal cancer – the silent killer

Every year in Slovenia, approximately 1,400 people fall ill with colorectal cancer. Unfortunately, many of them die – most often because the disease is detected too late.

The disease usually develops slowly, over several years, without visible or noticeable symptoms. When problems finally appear, the cancer is often already in an advanced stage, when treatment is more demanding.

Colorectal cancer can be completely curable if detected early enough. What is more – in many cases, it can even be prevented if precancerous changes on the intestinal mucosa, called polyps, are detected and removed in time.

This is possible with the help of the preventive screening Program Svit. That is precisely why your participation in Program Svit is so important – it enables early detection of the disease or even precancerous changes before symptoms appear.

By doing so, you can save your health or even your life!

Many years of experience of doctors in Slovenia and abroad show that the burden of colorectal cancer can be significantly reduced with regular faecal occult blood testing. Such testing enables the detection and removal of precancerous changes (polyps) and the detection of the disease in its initial stage – when it is still completely curable.

That is why **in Slovenia, since 2009, we have had Program Svit, intended for men and women aged 50 to 74.**



**Do not discard
your invitation.
Get tested!**

Colorectal cancer is a common but very insidious disease – it can develop in the body for several years without causing any noticeable symptoms.

In recent years, Program Svit has detected polyps or an early stage of cancer in many people who could not even imagine they might be ill. They are the best proof today of how important Program Svit is.

It has saved the health of many – and the lives of many others.



Photo: personal archive

Bojan Cizel

“When I first received the invitation to participate in Program Svit years ago, I was somewhat reluctant to participate, as I had no health problems and no symptoms that would indicate any need for it. Unfortunately, I notice that a similar mindset is still quite widespread.

After several repeated reminders, I finally responded to the invitation and I can say that it saved my life. The samples were positive and colon cancer was detected. Treatment followed, which was successfully completed 8 years ago, so I can live a normal, full life again.”

Viki Grošelj – mountain climber

“Although people agree that health is our greatest wealth, we only realise this when we fall ill. Svit is a program that has been persistently giving us the opportunity for years to preserve this wealth for as long as possible. Therefore, it is worth and sensible to respond to the invitation!”



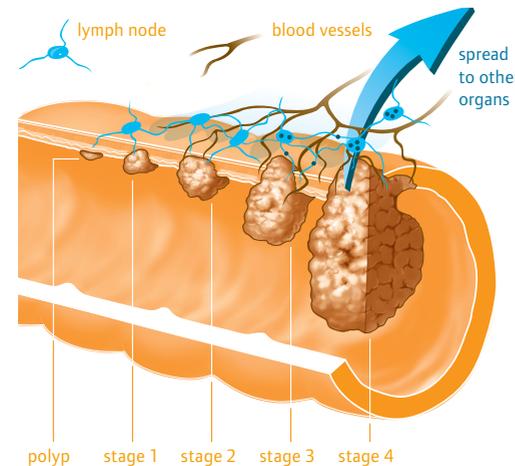
Photo: personal archive

How does the disease progress?

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women. It most commonly develops from precancerous changes in the intestinal mucosa – polyps. Although polyps are initially harmless, over the years some of their cells can change – and the polyp gradually develops into cancer. **The disease progresses slowly and very discreetly, without obvious symptoms.** That is precisely why it is often difficult to recognise it in time without a preventive examination.

- ✎ If the cancer remains confined only to the polyp, it can be removed quickly and effectively, often even without the need for further oncological treatment.
- ✎ However, if the disease progresses and begins to spread through the blood vessels and lymph nodes throughout the body, treatment becomes more demanding and less successful. In an advanced stage, cancer can seriously endanger life.

Therefore, it is of crucial importance to detect changes in the colon as soon as possible – even before cancer develops.



Stages of development of colon cancer

The risk of developing colorectal cancer is increased by:

chronic inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis), family predisposition to developing polyps, unhealthy lifestyle (smoking, alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, unbalanced diet with insufficient fibre, excess body weight, excessive consumption of red and processed meat).

Who is most at risk?

The risk of developing colorectal cancer increases with age. Most cases occur in people over the age of 50, but unfortunately, this disease can also affect younger people.

Particularly at risk are:

- ☞ the closest blood relatives of patients who developed colorectal cancer before the age of 60 (e.g. father, mother, brother or sister),
- ☞ persons with chronic inflammatory bowel disease, and
- ☞ people in whom polyps have already been detected in the intestine.

Since pathological changes in the body do not bleed all the time, it is very important that you participate in Program Svit every two years. This increases the chance that any potential bleeding will be detected in time.

Marcos Tavares, Maribor FC legend

"I decided to take on the mission of a Program Svit ambassador because I sincerely wish for precancerous and cancerous changes of the colon and rectum to be detected in time, so that treatment would be more successful. Health is a value worth investing in. Therefore, I advise everyone to take the opportunity offered by the screening Program Svit and take care of their health through regular participation!"



Photo: personal archive

How to participate in Program Svit?

1 FILL OUT THE STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

When you receive the invitation, **fill out and sign the Statement of Voluntary Participation** as soon as possible and send it back to Program Svit in the attached envelope free of charge.

2 YOU WILL RECEIVE A SAMPLING KIT BY MAIL

If you meet the criteria for inclusion in the program, you will receive two stool sampling kits by mail. In the privacy of your home, following simple instructions, you will **take stool samples** and **send them back by mail in the attached envelope free of charge.**

3 AN ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLES WILL BE PERFORMED IN THE LABORATORY

In the Program Svit laboratory, we will examine the samples and check whether invisible (occult) blood is present in the stool, which can be a sign of changes in the intestine.

4 YOU WILL RECEIVE THE RESULT BY MAIL

You will receive the result of the stool sample analysis by mail. Further steps will be explained in the attached letter if necessary.

If no blood is detected in the stool samples, the result will be negative.



This means that most likely nothing unusual is happening in the intestine. We will invite you to the next testing again in two years, and then regularly every two years until you reach the age of 74.

However, it is important to know that no examination is completely reliable. Therefore, despite a negative result, it is good to continue to monitor your body carefully – especially changes in bowel movements, the appearance of stool, and any abdominal pain. If you notice anything unusual, consult your selected personal physician – do not wait for the next Program Svit invitation.

IF YOU NOTICE ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS, CONSULT YOUR SELECTED PERSONAL PHYSICIAN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Which symptoms can mean that pathological changes have occurred in the intestine?

- Visible blood in the stool,
- a change in bowel habits (very thin stool, constipation followed by diarrhoea, black stool),
- severe or recurring abdominal pain, and
- unintentional weight loss.

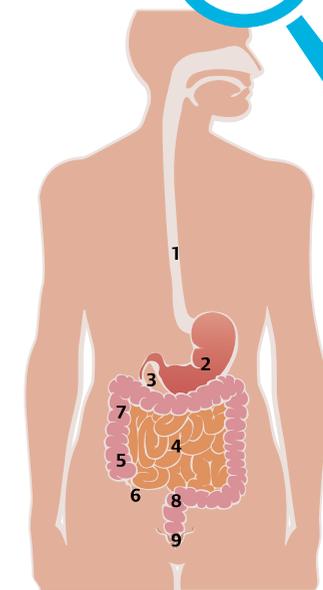
What if blood is detected in the stool samples?



If the test result in Program Svit is positive, it means that the presence of blood was detected in the stool samples. This by no means indicates that you have cancer – it only means that bleeding has occurred in the intestine, the cause of which must be investigated.

A detailed examination of the colon and rectum that will explain the causes of the bleeding is called a colonoscopy.

In most cases, the cause of bleeding is polyps, small mucosal growths from which cancer can develop over the years. They could be described as “time bombs”, but the good news is that they can be detected and removed in time during a colonoscopy – even before they cause problems.



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

Chief Physician Milan Stefanovič, gastroenterologist



Photo: Stane Jeršič

“Colonoscopy is an examination in which a doctor – an endoscopist looks into the large intestine using a thin, flexible instrument with a camera. An experienced endoscopist reliably detects and defines a precancerous change, and removes it safely and effectively. Colorectal cancer already present is detected in the screening program at a sufficiently early stage of development, when the success of treatment is usually excellent.”

Colonoscopy

Experience from Program Svit shows that in approximately 6% of people participating in the program, the presence of blood is detected in the stool samples. **We advise everyone who receives a positive result to undergo a colonoscopy within Program Svit.**



Photo: Alenka Peterlin

Colonoscopy is a safe and effective examination in which a specialist doctor thoroughly examines the colon and rectum. They use a special flexible tube with a small camera at the end, which allows for a precise examination of the intestinal mucosa. For the success of the examination, it is important that the bowel is well cleansed, which is achieved with a special diet and laxatives prescribed by your selected personal physician.

If a colonoscopy is required after testing, you will first visit your selected personal physician. Together, you will prepare a plan on how you will undergo the examination within Program Svit. **You will call the Program Svit call centre and arrange a date for the examination over the phone at one of the authorised Svit colonoscopy centres** operating across Slovenia. These diagnostic centres meet the highest professional standards and ensure high-quality and safe performance of the examination.



Photo: Lovro Rozina

The examination can be slightly uncomfortable, but for most people it is painless.

If the doctor discovers polyps during a colonoscopy, they can be removed immediately – and completely painlessly. The tissue samples taken are then sent for a precise histopathological examination to determine their nature.

What if it turns out that it is cancer?

The thought of cancer can be very frightening, and that is precisely why participation in preventive screening testing is so important – early detection of the disease greatly increases the chances of a full recovery.

If the examinations show that cancerous changes are present in the intestine, treatment begins immediately. It takes place under the careful guidance of experienced cancer treatment specialists and in cooperation with your selected personal physician.

Modern medicine enables very effective treatment of colorectal cancer – especially when the disease is detected at an early stage. Therefore, it is important not to hesitate. By responding in time and participating in Program Svit, you can preserve your health – and your life.

Samo Podgornik



Photo: personal archive

"It is nice, not just nice, it is wonderful that I am alive more than ten years after being diagnosed with colon cancer with liver metastases at the age of 52. Thanks to Program Svit for sending me the invitation to participate in the screening program. And because I responded, my cancer was detected in time. Surgery and chemotherapy, along with my will to recover, overcame all the difficulties that cancer brings into one's life."

I am proud that in December 2015, I signed the solemn declaration of the Program Svit ambassador. To me, this represents praise and encouragement to address Slovenian women and men with my story – which had a happy ending – to invite them to participate in Program Svit and, through conversation, to instil hope in those who face a similar experience."

Do not be afraid of the world inside. Get tested!

What can we do to avoid getting sick at all?

- ☞ Regularly participate in Program Svit and other screening programs.
- ☞ Choose a healthy lifestyle: more physical activity, a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy body weight should become part of our daily lives.
- ☞ Quit smoking, reduce or completely stop drinking alcohol, and give up on other harmful habits.
- ☞ Listen to your body and visit your doctor in case of bowel problems.
- ☞ Be a good example and encourage others to take preventive measures as well.

Silvestra Brodnjak

“Caring for health begins with small steps. One of them is regular testing for occult blood in the stool. Whenever you receive an invitation from Program Svit, respond!”

A friend confided in me that she had long delayed sending her stool sample. Her grandson, who saw a model of the large intestine at school and learned about Uncle SVIT, asked her if she had already received his mail. In an instant, she decided and did what she had not paid enough attention to. When the negative result arrived, she proudly showed it to her grandson and decided that from now on she would take advantage of the gift of Program Svit every two years.”



Photo: personal archive

Majda Gros

“I have been a positive and energetic person all my life, always active and happy to help. I can only thank Program Svit that I am still like this today. At the age of 50, I received an invitation to which I responded immediately. After the examinations, I was diagnosed with cancer. Since there were no prior signs, I was very surprised. Fortunately, we were fast enough and after successful treatment, I continue with my full life. Luck was on my side and I am grateful that we have programs such as Program Svit.

It saddens me that so many people still do not respond to the invitation. Life is too short to neglect your health, take time for yourself and respond to the invitation that can save your life.”



Photo: personal archive

About Program Svit,

the national programme for the early detection of precancerous changes and colorectal cancer.

Program Svit is a national screening program whose main goal is the early detection of precancerous changes and colorectal cancer.

In this way, we significantly contribute to reducing the number of cases and increase the chances of successful treatment and survival for patients with detected disease.

The program is made possible by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. Participation in the program is free of charge for participants, as it is fully covered by health insurance.

An invitation to the program is sent to women and men aged between 50 and 74. Faecal occult blood testing in Program Svit should be performed every two years until the age of 74.

Program Svit is part of the quality public healthcare system and is based on the latest findings of modern medicine. In its implementation, we strictly follow professional recommendations and the experiences of the most successful preventive programs from European Union countries and elsewhere in the world. **The program ensures a high level of quality at all levels of implementation – from screening and diagnostic procedures to the treatment of detected cancer.**



Invitations to the program and laboratory faecal occult blood tests are repeated every two years. Samples are processed in the central laboratory of Program Svit, which performs tests for the whole of Slovenia. Participants and their selected personal physicians are promptly informed of positive results, while only participants are informed of negative results. Selected personal physicians are informed once a year about all their patients who participated in the program.

Colonoscopies within Program Svit are performed by specially trained specialists in internal medicine – gastroenterologists – in affiliated health centres across Slovenia. Samples of tissue removed during colonoscopy are examined by specialist pathologists in histopathology laboratories. The treatment of patients with detected changes in the colon or rectum takes place under the auspices of experienced experts in various medical institutions.

Program Svit is professionally guided by a professional council consisting of renowned specialists from various fields of medicine. The holder of Program Svit is the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ), which manages, implements and coordinates the program. Medical staff from numerous health institutions across Slovenia participate in the implementation of the program.

BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF PROGRAM SVIT, ONLY UP TO 15% OF COLORECTAL CANCER CASES IN SLOVENIA WERE DETECTED AT AN EARLY STAGE.

TODAY, IN PROGRAM SVIT, WE DETECT UP TO 70% OF CANCER CASES SO EARLY THAT ONCOLOGICAL TREATMENT IS NOT EVEN NECESSARY.



SLOVENIAN NATIONAL
COLORECTAL CANCER
SCREENING PROGRAMME



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For additional information regarding Program Svit, you can contact Svit support within the health centre near you.

Upon your request, we can also send you materials about Program Svit in Italian, Hungarian, English, Albanian or Croatian. Audio materials and materials in Slovenian sign language are available on the website, where you will also find other interesting information.