

Colorectal Cancer *Health Message*



What Is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is a cancer of the lower digestive system that starts in the colon or the rectum. The cancer begins with small, noncancerous tumors called polyps. Some of these polyps can become cancerous. If diagnosed and treated early, colorectal cancer is highly treatable.

How Common Is Colorectal Cancer?

- It is the third-most common cancer type for both men and women in the U.S.
- At least half of all cases could be prevented by regular testing.

Cause of Colorectal Cancer

Unfortunately, we do not know the cause of most colorectal cancers. Some factors that might increase your risk of developing the disease are a family history of colon cancer, a low-fiber/high-fat diet, a sedentary/low-activity lifestyle, smoking, and heavy use of alcohol. Some groups of people such as diabetics and African Americans are at greater risk than others.

What You Can Do to Lower Your Risk of Colorectal Cancer

Eat Right

- Choose healthy foods and beverages for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Eat at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Choose whole grains.
- Limit red meats and processed meats (like hot dogs and cold cuts/deli meats).

Limit Alcohol

- No more than two alcoholic drinks a day for men and one for women.

Remain Active

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be active—at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week, or a combination spread throughout the week.

Be Proactive

- If you are age 50 or older, get tested for colorectal cancer.
- Talk with a doctor about which screening test is best for you.
- To find out if you need to start testing earlier or have more frequent tests, talk with a doctor about your medical history and your family history.
- Screening tests offer the best way to prevent colorectal cancer or to find it early. Finding cancer early gives you a better chance for successful treatment.

Tests that Find Both Polyps and Cancer

- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years, or
- Colonoscopy every 10 years, or
- Double contrast barium enema every 5 years, or
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy) every 5 years

These tests look inside the colon to find abnormal areas. If polyps are found, they can be removed before they turn into cancer, so these tests can prevent cancer.

Colorectal Cancer Risk Factors

“Risk factors” are anything that can increase or decrease a person’s chance of getting a disease, such as cancer. Some factors can be changed and some cannot. However, it is important to be informed of the risk factors.

Age	Most colorectal cancer occurs in people age 50 and older.
Diet	A diet high in red meats (like beef, pork, or lamb) and processed meats (like hot dogs, bacon, or cold cuts) raises risk.
	A diet high in fruits and vegetables lowers risk.
Physical activity	Less activity raises risk.
Overweight	Obesity raises risk of having and of dying from colorectal cancer.
Smoking	Raises risk.
Heavy alcohol use	Raises risk.
Type 2 diabetes	Raises risk.

More information is available. Visit the American Cancer Society (ACS) website at www.cancer.org or call 1-800-227-2345 to talk with an ACS cancer information specialist.

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