

Health Enews



Colorectal Cancer Awareness

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March is the designated month for recognition of colorectal cancer awareness. In 2018 alone, there will be approximately 135,000 people who will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Fortunately, colorectal cancer is highly preventable with more than 1.4 million colorectal cancer patients and survivors living today. Colorectal cancer is different than most cancers—it's largely preventable and beatable. Screening is the #1 way to prevent colorectal cancer because it finds cancer in the early stages or before it even has a chance to grow or develop. Typically, colorectal cancer begins as a slow-growing, small growth in the colon or rectum. Over time, these precancerous growths—called polyps—can turn into cancer.



Ways to reduce your risk for colon cancer include:

Exercise daily. Research shows adults who increase their physical activity, either in intensity, duration, or frequency, can reduce their risk of developing colon cancer by 30-40%.

Know your family history. A family history of colon cancer puts you at an increased risk for developing colon cancer. Screening should start at age 40 or 10 years before the youngest case in your immediate family.

Avoid alcohol and cigarettes. According to the National Cancer Institute, people who regularly drink 3.5 drinks per day have 1.5 times the risk of developing colon cancer as nondrinkers or occasional drinkers. Long term cigarette smoking is also associated with an increased risk of colon cancer. The longer a person smokes, the greater the risk.

Eat a balanced diet. Evidence shows that diets high in vegetables, fruits, and other plant foods reduce the risk for many diseases, including colon cancer. Foods containing lots of dietary fiber and nutrients, are a good source of a substance called phytochemicals, which help protect cells in the body from damage that can lead to cancer.



Reduce red meat consumption. Try to limit your red meat intake to 18 ounces (cooked) per week or less. Non-organic red meat from animals fed GMO grains and pumped full of antibiotics are significantly linked to an increased risk for colorectal cancer. Red meat contains natural compounds that transform into carcinogens when exposed to high heat. In fact, the high heat flame of a grill especially increases the natural formation of toxins like polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHCS) and heterocyclic animes (HCAs) which are known cancer causing agents. Other sources of these carcinogens are processed meats and should be avoided as even a low consumption increases the risk for cancer.

Symptoms of Colon Cancer

Unfortunately, colon cancer first develops with few, if any, symptoms. This is why screening is so important. If symptoms are present, they may include:

- ***Change in bowel habits.** Diarrhea, constipation, a change in the consistency of your stool.
- ***Persistent abdominal pain.** Cramps, gas, pain and/or feeling full and bloated or that your bowels do not empty.
- ***Rectal bleeding.** Finding blood (either bright red or very dark) in your stool.
- ***Weakness or fatigue.** Weakness and fatigue along with weight loss and nausea, or vomiting.

When to see a doctor:

If you notice any symptoms of colon cancer, such as blood in your stool or an ongoing change in bowel habits, do not hesitate to make an appointment with your doctor. Also, talk to your doctor about when you should begin screening for colon cancer as guidelines are affected by risk factors and family history.