

The Wellness News

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Colon Cancer Prevention and Early Detection

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Did you know that colorectal cancer is a leading cause of death in the United States? In fact, colon cancer is the third leading cause of death in men and the fourth cause of death in women in our country. With statistics on the rise, the importance of making proper lifestyle choices to prevent colon cancer is growing exponentially.

What is Colon Cancer?

Colon cancer affects the large intestine, found in the lower part of your digestive tract, while rectal cancer affects the last inches of the colon. Termed colorectal cancers, these diseases generally occur due to malignant (cancerous) tumors growing on the inner wall of the intestine. Most incidences of colon cancer begin as benign (noncancerous) clusters of cells called polyps. Over time these polyps can develop into cancer.

Risk Factors

When it comes to evaluating your risk for colorectal cancer, there are both controllable and uncontrollable factors. Uncontrollable factors that put people at higher risk for colon cancer include:

1. Older age
2. African-American race
3. Inflammatory diseases such as Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, etc.
4. Family history

However, several factors are within our control to avoid colorectal cancers. These factors include:

1. Diet
2. Exercise
3. Obesity
4. Tobacco use

Early stages of colorectal cancer usually do not show any symptoms. To check for malignant tumors, routine screenings are necessary beginning at age 50.

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How to Prevent Colorectal Cancer

Having a healthy lifestyle goes a long way in reducing the risk factors associated with colorectal cancers. Below are some great tips to put into action in your daily routine:

Exercise on a regular basis and be active. The American Heart Association recommends engaging in 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Eat a high-fiber diet consisting of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Men need around 35 g of fiber daily while women should consume 25 g per day. Reading food labels is a helpful way to ensure you are getting enough.

Avoid tobacco use. Tobacco can greatly increase your risk for colorectal cancer.

Avoid eating a high-fat diet. Studies have shown that people who eat excess fat from red meat and processed meats have higher rates of colon cancer.

Do not drink excessively. Drinking too much alcohol can cause the body's metabolic functions to slow and also contribute to increased weight gain.

Maintain a healthy weight to decrease your risk.

Screenings and Diagnosis

Regular screenings should begin at age 50 for an average person; however, if you are at an elevated risk, screenings should begin sooner than age 50. The following is a list of screenings and the timeline in which they should be completed:

- Colonoscopy: Every 10 years
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy: Every 5 years
- Double-contrast barium enema: Every 5 years
- Fecal occult blood test: Yearly
- Fecal immunochemical test: Yearly

Stages of Colon Cancer

Stage 0: The cancer has not grown beyond the inner layer of your colon.

Stage 1: The cancer has grown through the inner layer.

Stage 2: The cancer has grown through the wall of the colon.

Stage 3: The cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes.

Stage 4: The cancer has spread to other parts of your body and other organs.

Recurrent: The cancer has come back after treatment.

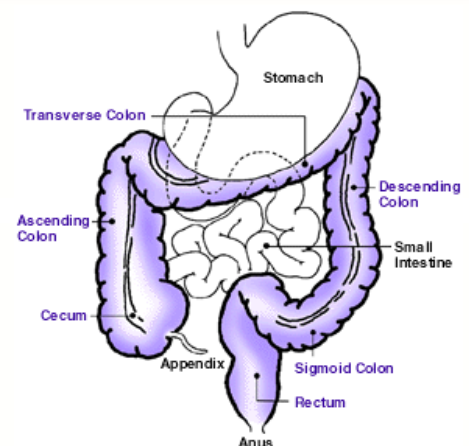


Diagram of the Colon and Rectum

Call Your Health Coach for More Information 1-800-433-2320

Sources: www.preventcancer.org, www.mayoclinic.com, www.heart.org, www.cdc.gov