

HealthMatters

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Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.

The good news: 90% of colorectal cancer cases are curable when detected early.¹

Understanding colorectal cancer

What is it?

Colorectal cancer is a disease that starts in the colon or the rectum. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus. These cancers can also be called colon cancer or rectal cancer, depending on where they start.

How does colorectal cancer start?

Most colorectal cancers start as a growth on the inner lining of the colon or rectum. These growths are called polyps. There are different types of polyps.

Some types of polyps can change into cancer, but not all polyps become cancer. The chance of a polyp turning into cancer depends on the type of polyp it is.

Factors that can make a polyp more likely to contain cancer or increase someone's risk of developing colorectal cancer include:

- If a polyp larger than 1 cm is found
- If more than 3 polyps are found
- If the polyp looks abnormal under a microscope when pathologist looks at it

Risk factors of colorectal cancer

- Increases with age, especially after age 50
- A personal or family history of colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer
- Having type 2 diabetes

Did you know? African Americans have highest level of colorectal cancer of all racial groups in the United States

Prevention is key

Screening tests can find precancerous polyps, so that they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early, when treatment works best.

¹. Based on a 5-year survival rate

Talk to your provider about your risk and what screening options are best for you.

Lifestyle choices to reduce colorectal cancer risk factors

There are several risk factors that might increase a person's chance of developing colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer. Eating habits, weight, and exercise are some of the strongest links to colorectal cancer risk. Making healthy lifestyle choices can help reduce colorectal cancer risks.

Maintain a healthy weight

If you are overweight or obese, your risk of developing colorectal cancer is higher, and the link seems to be stronger in men. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight may lower your risk.

Increase physical activity

Being more active lowers your risk of colorectal cancer and polyps. Increasing the **amount** and **intensity** of physical activity can lower your risk.

Limit alcohol

Your body breaks alcohol down into a chemical called acetaldehyde, which can damage your DNA and prevents your body from repairing the damage. When DNA is damaged, a cell can begin growing out of control and create a cancer tumor.

Stop using tobacco

Tobacco use can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body. Smoke from cigarettes, cigars, and pipes has at least 70 cancer causing chemicals, many of which can damage DNA.

Want to learn more?

Contact your provider to discuss your lifestyle habits today!

Sources:

Colorectal Cancer | American Cancer Society, accessed 11/15/2022
Colorectal (Colon) Cancer | CDC, accessed 11/15/2022
Effects of Diet and Physical Activity on Risks for Certain Cancers | American Cancer Society, accessed 1/24/2023
Alcohol and Cancer | CDC, accessed 1/24/2023
Tobacco and Cancer | CDC, accessed 1/24/2023

Choose whole foods

Whole foods are high in fiber, provide essential vitamins and nutrients and make it easier to maintain a healthy weight. Try more of these:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables with their skin on
- Whole grain breads and cereals such as oats or barley
- Legumes and beans such as chickpeas or lentils

Eat fiber rich foods

The American Heart Association dietary fiber intake recommendation is 25-35 grams daily on a 2,000-calorie diet for adults. Fiber intake should include both soluble and insoluble fiber.

Soluble fiber

- A type of fiber that dissolves in water, forms a gel, and slows digestion to help you feel full
- Found in oats, peas, beans, apples, citrus fruits, carrots, barley, and psyllium

Insoluble fiber

- A type of fiber that isn't broken down by the gut and adds bulk to waste to help keep you regular
- Found in whole-wheat flour, wheat bran, nuts, beans and vegetables, such as cauliflower, green beans, and potatoes

Choose healthy fats

- Omega-3 fatty acids found in nuts, seeds, and fatty fish (such as salmon or mackerel).
- Choose lean meats, such as poultry, and fish, without the skin.
- Use healthy cooking methods such as baking, broiling, or roasting.