

Colon Cancer Awareness: Nationwide Priority

American Cancer Society Encourages Both Men and Women Get Screened;

Both men *and* women are at risk for colon cancer. The American Cancer Society is using March's National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month as an opportunity to inform the public on the importance of prevention and early detection.

What many Americans don't know is that colon cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer. Studies show colon cancer early detection and treatment can reduce deaths from this disease, yet only 38 percent of colon cancers are detected in the earliest and most treatable stage.

Colorectal cancer (commonly referred to as colon cancer) is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States, claiming more lives than either breast or prostate cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, when colon cancers are found at an early stage the five-year survival rates are as high as 90 percent. For colon cancers found at a later, more advanced stage, the five-year survival rate drops to less than 10 percent.

Personal risk for colon cancer varies, so your doctor can help you make informed decisions about when to begin testing and the most appropriate testing method for you. Factors associated with increased risk for colon cancer, as well as information on prevention, early detection, and treatment of the disease, can be found on the American Cancer Society's Web site at www.cancer.org or by calling the Society's National Cancer Information Center at 1-800-ACS-2345.

Can Colorectal Cancer Be Prevented?

Even though we don't know exactly what causes colorectal cancer, there are some steps you can take to reduce your risk.

Screening tests: First, you should follow the early detection guidelines mentioned below to help find colon or rectal cancer. When these cancers are found and treated early, they can often be cured. Screening can also find polyps. Removing these polyps helps prevent some cancers.

People who have a history of colorectal cancer in their family should check with their doctor for advice about screening tests or other tests to find cancer early.

Diet and exercise: It is important to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods and to limit high-fat foods. Some studies suggest that taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid or folate can lower colorectal cancer risk. Other studies suggest that getting more calcium with supplements or low-fat dairy products can help. Getting enough exercise is important as well. The American Cancer Society recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity on 5 or more days of the week.

Aspirin and other drugs: Aspirin appears to prevent the growth of polyps. A drug called Celebrex also reduces polyps for some people whose family members tend to develop polyps. But these medicines can have side effects. For this reason, experts do not advise the general public to take them as a colorectal cancer prevention method. If you are at high risk for colorectal cancer, talk to your doctor about what you should do.

Female hormones: Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for women after menopause may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer and osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). But those women who do get colorectal cancer may have a fast growing disease. HRT may also increase the risk of heart disease, blood clots, and breast and uterine cancer. Whether or not to use HRT is something women should discuss with their doctors.

Other factors: People with a family history of colorectal cancer may benefit from starting screening tests when they are younger and having them done more often than people without this risk factor.

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