



Be brave and pick up the phone...

Scheduling your screening can actually help prevent colorectal cancer



Over our lifetimes, about one in 20 of us will develop colon cancer, also called colorectal cancer.¹ When it is caught early, survival rates are better than 90 percent.² That's why regular screenings are so important.

What is colon cancer?

Your colon is part of your large intestine. It absorbs water from the food you eat and turns the rest into waste.³ Most of the time, colon cancer starts in cells that make mucus and other fluids.⁴

Normally, cells grow as your body needs them, to replace old cells as they die. But sometimes new cells form more quickly than they are needed, or old and damaged cells do not die. They can form tumors, or move to other parts of the body. Colon cancer doesn't usually cause symptoms early on, so you should have regular screenings for colon cancer beginning at age 40 or 50, depending on your risk factors.⁵ Risk factors include:⁶

- Being older than 50.
- Having type 2 diabetes.
- Being African American or a Jewish person of Eastern European heritage.
- Having a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps.
- Having a history of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Talk with your doctor about how often you should be screened, and when you should start.

Helpful resources

Check out the Colorectal Cancer Health Center on WebMD for a risk assessment tool, the latest research and prevention news, and online support groups for people diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Go to webmd.com/colorectal-cancer.



¹ American Cancer Society website: What are the key statistics about colorectal cancer? (accessed November 2014): cancer.org.

² Fight Colorectal Cancer website: Survival Statistics (accessed November 2014): fightcolorectalcaner.org.

³ American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons website: The colon: What it is, what it does, why it is important (accessed November 2014): fascrs.org.

⁴ National Cancer Institute website: Colon and Rectal Cancer (accessed November 2014): cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal.

⁵ American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons website: Colorectal Cancer (accessed November 2014): fascrs.org.

⁶ American Cancer Society website: What are the risk factors for colorectal cancer? (accessed November 2014): cancer.org.

⁷ American Cancer Society website: Colorectal cancer screening tests (accessed November 2014): cancer.org.



Screening: How bad is it?

Not that bad. Some screenings can even be done at home following instructions from your doctor.

For most kinds of screenings, you'll need to follow a certain diet for a day or two ahead of time. For the tests you'd have at your doctor's office, you'll need to take laxatives or use an enema so your colon is empty. During the screening your doctor can give you a sedative to help you relax.⁷

During the test your doctor will remove polyps, which are small growths that can become cancerous, and send them and any biopsy tissue samples to a lab to be examined by a pathologist. Because colon cancer can actually be prevented by removing polyps, you owe it to yourself and your loved ones to have yourself screened.⁷

What can I do to prevent colon cancer?

Some risk factors, like your age, medical history or heritage, are things you can't control. But there are other things you can do to lower your risk for colon cancer.⁷

- **Eat a plant-based diet.** A diet high in vegetables, fruits and whole grains lowers your risk of colorectal cancer. Eating a lot of red meat or processed meat raises your risk.
- **Get moving.** An active lifestyle reduces your risk.
- **Stay at a healthy weight.** Being very overweight or obese increases the risk of colon cancer, especially in men.
- **Limit alcohol.** Heavy drinking has been linked to colorectal cancer. Have no more than one (for women) or two (for men) drinks a day.
- **Stay away from cigarettes.** Smoking makes you more likely to develop colorectal cancer. If you smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting.

The most important thing you can do to prevent colon cancer is to get screened. Talk to your doctor about your family history and risk factors, and what screening schedule is right for you.

Because colon cancer can actually be prevented by your doctor removing polyps during screenings,⁷ you owe it to yourself and your loved ones to get screened.

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