

Body MIND

TAKE A STAND

Colorectal cancer is a type of cancer that begins in the colon or rectum. With the exception of skin cancer, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer found in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that there will be approximately 108,070 new cases of colon cancer and 40,740 new cases of rectal cancer this year.

Symptoms of colorectal cancers include a change in bowel habits—such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool—that lasts for more than a few days, rectal bleeding or blood in the stool, a feeling that a bowel movement is necessary that is not relieved by doing so, cramping, steady abdominal pain, and weakness and fatigue. These symptoms may be caused by conditions other than colorectal cancer; it is important to consult a physician for diagnosis.

RISK FACTORS

Some risk factors for colorectal cancer cannot be changed. These include age; a personal history of colorectal cancer or polyps; a personal history of bowel disease; and family history of colorectal cancer. Other risk factors can be controlled, however. Modifiable risk factors include:

- Particular diets – Diets high in fruits and vegetables are associated with a decreased risk of colon cancer, while diets high in red meat or processed meats may increase risk for colon cancer.
- Physical inactivity – Engaging in exercise may lower risk.
- Overweight – Risk of dying from colon cancer is increased for very overweight individuals.
- Type 2 diabetes – People who have type 2 diabetes have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer.

- Smoking – Long-time smokers are more likely than non-smokers to die of colorectal cancer, according to the American Cancer Society.
- Alcohol – Colorectal cancer has been associated with heavy alcohol use.

PREVENTION AND EARLY DETECTION

Fortunately, the death rate associated with colorectal cancer has been declining for the last fifteen years. There tend to be fewer cases of the disease thanks to early detection and improved treatments. For this reason, it is vital to get the recommended screenings. Growths, called polyps, often can be detected before they turn cancerous. Additionally, colorectal cancer found early has a higher chance of being successfully treated. The American Cancer Society's guidelines for the early detection of colorectal cancer recommend that beginning at age 50, both men and women at average risk for developing colorectal cancer should undergo one of a variety of recommended screening tests. To determine which screening test is appropriate for you, talk to your physician. Additionally, the American Cancer Society recommends that people who have a history of colorectal cancer in their family should check with their doctor for advice about when and how often to have screening tests.

If you experience symptoms of colorectal cancer, consult a physician for diagnosis and treatment options.

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