

# COLON CANCER AWARENESS

Colon cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, so staying up to date with the appropriate screening is important and can be lifesaving.

Colorectal cancer almost always develops from precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon or rectum, and screening tests can find and possibly remove them before they turn into cancer. Staying up-to-date with routine testing can help prevent colorectal cancer or find it at an early stage when it is smaller and easier to treat.

## AT WHAT AGE SHOULD YOU GET SCREENED?

According to the American Cancer Society, all men and women without a family history should begin colorectal screenings at age 45. Thankfully, there are several screening methods available, including at-home tests. Talk with your physician about screening options that best fit your need.

## KNOW YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Family history plays an important role in determining your risk for cancer. Approximately 1 in 4 colorectal cancer patients have a family history of colorectal cancers. Talk with your family to better understand your family history and speak with your physician if any of the following are true:

- At least one first degree relative (parent, brother, sister, child) diagnosed with colorectal cancer under the age of 60.
- Multiple (2 or more) second-degree relatives



Colon cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.

Staying up to date on your screenings can be lifesaving.

(grandparents, aunts, uncles) diagnosed with colorectal cancer or have a history of multiple polyps.

Knowing your family history is important as people with a family history should begin screening at age 40 or 10 years before the youngest cancer case in your immediate family, whichever is earlier. Talk with your physician to determine when you should start colorectal screening.

## SCREENING OPTIONS

**Stool-based screening tests** look at the stool (feces) for possible signs of colorectal cancer or polyps. Some tests look for small amounts of blood in the stool because blood vessels in larger colorectal polyps or cancer are often fragile and easily damaged by stool passage. The damaged vessels bleed into the colon or rectum, but there isn't enough blood to be seen. Other tests look for abnormal sections of DNA from cancer or polyp cells in the stool.

45

According to the American Cancer Society, all men and women without a family history should begin colorectal screenings at age 45.



### Regular exercise can reduce your risk of cancer.

Aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days/week.



The advantages of stool testing are that it is done at home, and they are less invasive. At-home stool kits come with instructions and supplies needed to collect the sample correctly. Some disadvantages to keep in mind: they need to be done more often (annually), they can miss many polyps and some cancers, and can have false-positive rates. If your results are positive (abnormal), your physician will recommend a colonoscopy.

**Colonoscopies** are recommended for anyone at high risk for colon cancer due to family history or an abnormal result from a stool-based test. A colonoscopy is also recommended for anyone experiencing any of the following symptoms: blood in bowel movements, change in bowel habits, abdominal pain, weight loss, or unexplained anemia.

### HEALTHY LIVING TIPS

In addition to staying up-to-date with colon cancer screenings, healthy lifestyle behaviors can decrease your risk of developing colon cancer.

- **Engage in regular exercise.** Research consistently shows that adults who increase their physical activity, either in intensity, duration, or frequency, can reduce their risk of developing colorectal cancer by 30-40 percent!! Aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days/week. In addition, exercise increases blood flow to the digestive tract, which helps with motility, and it increases the healthy bacteria in our gut that helps us fight infections.
- **Eat a diet that is high in fiber,** including fruits and vegetables such as raspberries, apples, pears, peas and broccoli and whole grains, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-wheat pasta.
- **Eat lean protein** sources such as chicken, turkey, and fish and reduce red meat and processed meats (ex: smoked or cured meats).
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Maintain healthy body weight.**
- **Limit alcohol consumption.** No more than one alcoholic drink/day.
- **Don't smoke.** If you smoke and would like help quitting, 1-800-QUIT-NOW is a free resource.
- **Make time to use the restroom when you have the urge.**
- **Manage stress.**

### BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Colon cancer develops with few and many times NO symptoms. It is essential to be aware of the following and to contact your physician if you experience the following:

- A change in bowel habits, this includes the consistency and shape of your stool.
- Persistent abdominal discomfort such as cramping, bloating, and gas.
- Feelings of weakness or fatigue.
- Blood in your stool that is either bright red or very dark.
- Listen to your body, and if you have any questions or concerns, reach out to your physician.

### RESOURCES

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY GUIDELINE FOR DIET AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY  
INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING  
BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER  
8 EARLY WARNING SIGNS AND STAGES OF COLON CANCER  
COLORECTAL CANCER ALLIANCE