

Colorectal Health

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States, but it doesn't have to be. If everyone age 50 and over had regular screening tests, at least 60% of deaths from colon cancer could be avoided.

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or rectum. Sometimes it is called colon cancer. The colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus.

Who gets colorectal cancer?

- Both men and women can get it.
- It is most often found in people 50 or older.
- The risk increases with age.

Other factors that play a role in the development of colorectal cancer may include:

- **Diet** - people with diets high in vegetables and fruits have been shown to have a lower risk of colon cancer. Diets high in processed food and/or red meats have been linked to a higher risk.
- **Weight** - Obesity raises the risk of colon cancer in both men and women.
- **Exercise** - adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate or high physical activity on 5 or more days of the week.
- **Smoking** - inhaled or swallowed tobacco smoke carries agents that cause cancer to the colon. Tobacco use seems to increase polyp size.
- **Family History** - Know your family history as it may determine your level of risk for colon cancer.

Are you at Risk?

Average Risk:

- Men and Women
- Age 50 and above

Medium Risk:

- If you have had a precancerous polyp or colorectal cancer
- If a 1st degree relative (mother, father, sister, brother or your children) has had precancerous colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.

High Risk:

- If you have a type of inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis.
- If you have a genetic syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer.

People at high risk for colorectal cancer may need earlier or more frequent tests than other people. Talk to your health care provider about when to begin screening and how often you should be tested.

Screening Saves Lives

If you're 50 or older, getting a colon cancer screening test could save your life. Here are the facts:

- Colorectal cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum.
- A polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there and over time, some polyps can turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can find polyps, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. When it is found early, you have a much better chance of survival.

(more on back)

Be Active // Be Healthy

What are the Symptoms?

Precancerous polyps and early-stage colorectal cancer don't always have symptoms, especially at first. This means that someone could have polyps or colon cancer and not know it. Some people do have symptoms and they may include:

- blood in or on your stool
- stomach pain, aches or cramps that don't go away
- losing weight and you don't know why

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your health care provider. These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer. However, the only way to know is to see your health care provider and get screened.

Types of Colorectal Screening Tests

There are several different tests that can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer. Each can be used alone, but sometimes they are used in combination with each other. Talk to your health care provider about which test(s) are right for you.

High-Sensitivity FOBT (Stool Test) - a test to check stool (solid waste) for blood that can only be seen with a microscope. Small samples of stool are placed on special cards and returned to the health care provider/lab for testing.

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy - a procedure to look inside the rectum and sigmoid (lower) colon for polyps (small pieces of bulging tissue), abnormal areas, or cancer. A sigmoidoscope is inserted through the rectum into the sigmoid colon. A sigmoidoscope is a thin, tube-like instrument with a light and lens for viewing. It may also have a tool to remove polyps or tissue.

Colonoscopy - a procedure to look inside the rectum and colon for polyps, abnormal areas, or cancer. A colonoscope is inserted through the rectum into the colon. A colonoscope is a thin, tube-like instrument with a light and lens for viewing. It may also have a tool to remove polyps or tissue samples, which are checked under a microscope for signs of cancer.

Resources

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

CDC - Screen for Life

www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife

Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program

www.dhhs.ne.gov/crc

Stay in the Game

www.StayInTheGameNE.com

National Cancer Institute

www.nci.nih.gov

For More Information:

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www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth and www.dhhs.ne.gov/menshealth