



A LOOK AT COLORECTAL CANCER & PREVENTION

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which malignant (cancer) cells form in the tissues of the colon or the rectum.

The colon and the rectum are parts of the large intestine, which is the lower part of the body's digestive system. During digestion, food moves through the stomach and small intestine into the colon. The colon absorbs water and nutrients from the food and stores waste matter (stool). Stool moves from the colon into the rectum before it leaves the body. Most colorectal cancers are adenocarcinomas (cancers that begin in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids). Colorectal cancer often begins as a growth called a polyp, which may form on the inner wall of the colon or rectum. Some polyps become cancer over time. Finding and removing polyps can prevent colorectal cancer.

What is prevention?

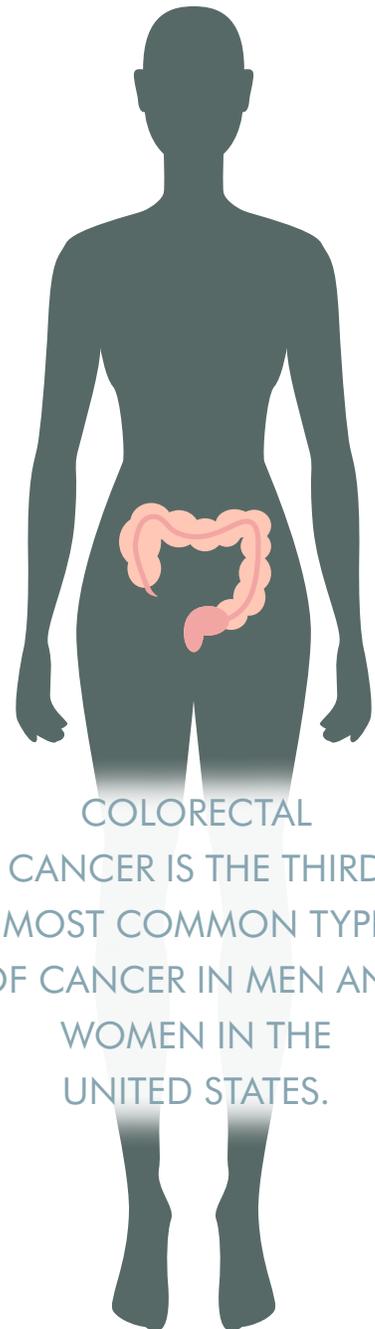
Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in men and women in the United States. Deaths from colorectal cancer

have decreased with the use of colonoscopies and fecal occult blood tests, which check for blood in the stool.

Cancer prevention is action taken to lower the chance of getting cancer. By preventing cancer, the number of new cases of cancer in a group or population is lowered. Hopefully, this will lower the number of deaths caused by cancer.

To prevent new cancers from starting, scientists look at risk factors and protective factors. Anything that increases your chance of developing cancer is called a cancer risk factor; anything that decreases your chance of developing cancer is called a cancer protective factor.

Some risk factors for cancer can be avoided, but many cannot. For example, both smoking and inheriting certain genes are risk factors for some types of cancer, but only smoking can be avoided. Regular exercise and a healthy diet may be protective factors for some types of cancer. Avoiding risk factors and increasing protective factors may lower your risk, but it does not mean that you will not get cancer.



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The following **risk factors increase** the risk of colorectal cancer:

AGE | The risk of colorectal cancer increases after age 50. Most cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed after age 50.

FAMILY HISTORY OF COLORECTAL CANCER | Having a parent, brother, sister, or child with colorectal cancer doubles a person's risk of colorectal cancer.

PERSONAL HISTORY | Having a personal history of the following condition increases the risk of colorectal cancer:

- › Previous colorectal cancer.
- › High-risk adenomas (colorectal polyps that are 1 centimeter or larger in size).

- › Ovarian cancer
- › Inflammatory bowel disease.

ALCOHOL | Drinking 3 or more alcoholic beverages per day increases the risk of colorectal cancer.

CIGARETTE SMOKING | Cigarette smoking is linked to an increased risk of colorectal cancer and death from colorectal cancer.

Smoking cigarettes is also linked to an increased risk of forming colorectal adenomas. Cigarette smokers who have had surgery to remove colorectal adenomas are at an increased risk for the adenomas to come back.

OBESITY | Obesity is linked to an increased risk of colorectal cancer and death from colorectal cancer.

The following **protective factors decrease** the risk of colorectal cancer:

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY | A lifestyle that includes regular physical activity is linked to a decreased risk of colorectal cancer.

ASPIRIN | Taking aspirin every day for at least 5 years decreases the risk of colorectal cancer and the risk of death from colorectal cancer. In a study of women, taking aspirin every other day for 10 years decreased the risk of colorectal cancer.



KEY POINTS

■ Avoiding risk factors and increasing protective factors may help prevent cancer.

■ The following risk factors **increase** the risk of colorectal cancer:

- › Age
- › Family history of colorectal cancer
- › Personal history
- › Inherited risk
- › Alcohol
- › Cigarette smoking
- › Obesity

■ The following protective factors **decrease** the risk of colorectal cancer:

- › Physical activity
- › Aspirin
- › Combination
- › hormone replacement therapy
- › Polyp removal

■ The effect of the following factors on the risk of colorectal cancer **is not known**:

- › Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) other than aspirin
- › Diet
- › Vitamins
- › Calcium

■ Taking medicine to reduce cholesterol levels does not affect the risk of colorectal cancer.

■ Cancer prevention clinical trials are used to study ways to prevent cancer.

■ New ways to prevent colorectal cancer are being studied in clinical trials.