

Colorectal Health

Prevention is possible. Detection is key. Screening is the way!

Colorectal cancer is among the leading types of cancer deaths in the United States. Approximately 90 percent of individuals diagnosed with colon cancer are over 50 years of age, yet more than 60 percent of individuals over age 50 have not been screened. If you or a close relative have had colorectal polyps, cancer or inflammatory bowel disease, you may need to be screened earlier. Talk with your doctor about when you should begin screening.

In some people it is clear why they developed colorectal cancer—they inherited it. Although, sometimes there isn't an identifiable cause, which is why screening is so important.

It is very common for people who have polyps or even colon cancer not to show symptoms, especially initially. If signs and symptoms of colon cancer do appear, they may include changes in bowel habits, blood in stool, rectal bleeding or unexplained weight loss. These symptoms could also be indicative of something other than colon cancer, so be sure to follow-up with your doctor.

Most cases of colon cancer begin as small, noncancerous (benign) clumps of cells or polyps. If not found and removed, some types of polyps can become cancerous over time and spread to other parts of the body. The screening tests can find polyps or colon cancer early on when treatment toward a cure is possible and the prognosis is very good.

You may be embarrassed by the screening procedures, worried about discomfort or afraid of the results. There are several tests that can be used alone or in combination to screen for colorectal cancer. Discuss your screening options and your concerns with your doctor and remember that working with a doctor you like and trust can help ease your embarrassment.

You can take steps to reduce your risk of colon cancer by making changes in your everyday life. The American Cancer Society recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity on five or more days a week. The National Cancer Institute recommends a low-fat, high-fiber diet that includes at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. To increase the amount of fiber in your diet, eat more whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables.

Some medications (aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories and celebrex) have been found to reduce the risk of precancerous polyps or colon cancer. If you have an increased risk of colon cancer, you may want to discuss the benefits and risks of these medications with your doctor.

Resources: www.cancer.gov; www.mayoclinic.com;
www.healthandwellness.com; www.webmd.com

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: **800.327.2384**

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