



8 RIGHT WAYS[®]

TO PREVENT COLON CANCER



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Colon cancer doesn't get the same attention as some higher-profile cancers, but it should. It's the third most common cancer in the United States – with around 150,000 people diagnosed each year. And a growing number of these cancers are being found in younger adults under the age of 50.

But there's another important fact about colon cancer: **It can be prevented.** Seventy-five percent of all cases could be avoided by things you can do.

Use these eight tips as a guide to lowering your risk. Start with one or two and build from there.
It's your health. Take control.

1. Get screened

Getting regular screening tests for colon cancer is the single best way to protect yourself from the disease. It can catch cancer early, when it's most treatable, **and** help prevent the disease by finding abnormal growths called polyps that can turn into cancer.

There are a number of effective screening tests for colon cancer. Some are easy to do but need to be done more often. Others are more involved but need to be done less often. Which test you have depends on your personal preferences and medical history. A doctor can help you decide.

Most people begin getting tested at age 45. People with a family history of colon cancer or other important risk factors may begin testing at younger ages and get tested more often.



The colon (or large intestine) is the last part of the digestive tract.

COMMON RECOMMENDED SCREENING OPTIONS

If a test finds anything suspicious, a follow-up colonoscopy is usually needed.

Colonoscopy

How often: **every 10 years**

Test that uses a small flexible tube with a camera at the end to examine the full length of the inside of the colon. You are sedated for the test, so you need a ride home afterward. If the exam finds polyps or other suspicious growths, they can be removed during the test.

Home Stool Tests

These tests are quick and easy. You collect a sample of your stool at home, which is then sent to a lab to be tested.

FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) or FOBT (Fecal Occult Blood Test)

How often: **every year**

These tests look for hidden blood in the stool, which can be a sign of cancer.

Stool DNA

How often: **every 3 years**

This test that looks for hidden blood plus DNA changes from cancer or polyp cells.

Sigmoidoscopy, virtual colonoscopy and barium enema are also effective screening tests. Talk to a doctor about your options.

Getting ready for a screening test

Screening tests like colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy require special steps beforehand to clear out the colon. This usually means a diet of clear liquids a day or two before the test, then the use of a laxative or enema the night and/or morning before.

2. Maintain a healthy weight

Except for smoking, nothing else raises the overall risk of cancer more than being overweight. At least 13 different cancers have been linked to weight gain and obesity, including colon cancer. If you've put on weight, a good first goal is to try to stop gaining weight – which has health benefits by itself. Then, for a bigger health boost, slowly work to lose some pounds.

3. Don't smoke

It hardly needs saying anymore, but not smoking is the single best thing you can do for your health. Smoking causes 15 different cancers, including colon cancer. Plus, it increases the risk of other serious diseases like heart disease, stroke and emphysema. If you smoke, quitting has real benefits, which start shortly after your last cigarette. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (In Illinois, 1-866-QUIT-YES) or visit smokefree.gov for help. Talking to a doctor can double your chances of success.

4. Be physically active

It's hard to beat regular activity. It lowers the risk of many serious diseases, including colon cancer, and provides a good mental boost. Any amount of physical activity is better than none, but it's good to try for around 30 minutes or more of moderate activity each day. Choose things you enjoy, like brisk walking, cycling, dancing or gardening.

5. Limit alcohol - Zero is best

While moderate drinking may be heart-healthy in older adults, drinking even low amounts of alcohol can raise the risk of colon cancer and breast cancer. And with the other risks of alcohol, not drinking is the overall healthiest choice.

6. Limit red meat, especially processed meat

Eating too much red meat – like steak, hamburger and pork – increases the risk of colon cancer.

And processed meats – like bacon, sausage and bologna – raise risk even more. Try to eat less than three servings each week. And less is even better.

75% of all colon cases could be avoided by things you can do.

7. Get enough calcium and vitamin D

There is good evidence that getting enough calcium and vitamin D can help protect against colon cancer. Try for 1000 to 1200 mg per day of calcium and about 1000 IU per day of vitamin D. Good sources of calcium include low-fat dairy, fortified plant-based milks, nuts, beans and greens. Good sources of vitamin D include eggs, fatty fish (like tuna) and fortified dairy products. A standard multivitamin can help fill gaps but should not take the place of real food or a healthy diet.

8. Eat more whole grains and fiber

Eating a diet rich in whole grains and fiber can lower the risk of colon cancer. But most people don't get enough of either. A general goal is to try to eat 3 or more servings of whole grains every day, and 22 to 34 grams of fiber every day, depending on sex and age. Focus on fruits, vegetables, beans and whole-grain foods, like 100% whole-wheat bread and whole-grain cereals and pasta.

Other important risk factors for colon cancer

Though colon cancer is very preventable, there are still a number of important risk factors that people can't control. Knowing which ones apply to you can help you understand your risk and take steps to lower it. If you feel you're at high risk, talk to a doctor or health professional. These can increase colon cancer risk:

- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Family history of colon cancer

Know Your Risk. Change Your Future.

Visit yourdiseaserisk.wustl.edu and, with just a few taps or clicks, get a personal estimate of your colon cancer risk and custom prevention tips.

 **Your Disease Risk**
THE SOURCE ON PREVENTION

Online Resources

Your Disease Risk
yourdiseaserisk.wustl.edu

8ight Ways to Prevent Cancer
8ways.wustl.edu

CDC-Family Health History
cdc.gov/genomics/famhistory

**CDC-Healthy Weight, Nutrition,
and Physical Activity**
cdc.gov/healthyweight

National Cancer Institute
cancer.gov

American Cancer Society
cancer.org

CDC – Screen for Life
cdc.gov/screenforlife

SmokeFree.gov
smokefree.gov

For more information about Siteman Cancer Center and our locations, visit siteman.wustl.edu or call **800-600-3606**.



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