

- Cancer

Caring for your colon

How to prevent colorectal cancer

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When food and fluids are ingested, they travel through our digestive tract, which begins with the mouth and ends with the colon or large intestine where stool is formed, and the rectum, which serves as a temporary storehouse for stool or feces.



The colon is also responsible for the reabsorption of water and electrolytes, as well as the fermentation of indigestible fiber and food by the friendly bacteria in the gut. Did you ever wonder why you have difficulty passing out stool when you don't drink enough water? Constipation occurs when we are dehydrated because the colon pulls water from food to be used by the body. Thus, forming hard stool.

The American Cancer Society says that colorectal cancer may not cause symptoms right away but these are the signs to watch out for: Change in bowel habits like diarrhea and constipation, narrowing of the stool that lasts for more than a few days, a feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that's not relieved by having one, rectal bleeding with bright red blood, blood in the stool which results to dark, brown, or black stool, cramping or belly pain, weakness, fatigue, and unintended or unexplained weight loss.

According to the World Health Organization, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the world. Two million cases were diagnosed in 2020, which made it the second most common cause of cancer death with almost one million deaths per year. More than half of these recorded cases and deaths are found in Asia with China accounting for more than half a million new cases and more than 280,000 deaths per year. Japan comes in second place with 60,000 deaths per year.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) estimates the global burden of colorectal cancer to increase globally by 56 percent in the next two decades. That is approximately three million new cases per year. Moreover, a 69 percent increase in the number of deaths due to colorectal cancer is estimated by the year 2040. That is about 1.6 million deaths worldwide.

What happens when one gets colon or colorectal cancer? Is it possible to live without a colon? The answer is yes. Bowel resection is done through surgery where the affected part of the large intestine is removed. In some cases, a colostomy bag is attached to the body. This collects the stool.

Colorectal cancer or commonly referred to as colon cancer is preventable through adapting a healthier lifestyle and having colorectal cancer screening like colonoscopy to remove pre-cancerous growth called polyps. These polyps grow slowly and may take about 10 years to develop into cancer, therefore it is best to nip it in the bud.

Colon cancer can run in your genes too but you have the chance not to express these genes by living a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some ways on how to take care of your colon health.

Avoid smoking and alcoholic beverages.

Smoking and alcohol consumption have been greatly associated with colon cancer risk. In fact, IARC researchers showed that alcohol consumption was responsible for more than 160,000 new cases in 2020, which accounts for eight percent of total cases diagnosed that year.

Avoid red or processed meats.

A study on about 500,000 people was published by the International Journal of Epidemiology on April 17, 2019, which found that people who consumed red or processed meat four or more times a week had a 20 percent increased risk of colorectal cancer compared to those who only consume these less than twice a week.

Achieve a healthy weight.

According to IARC, obesity is also a risk factor for colon cancer. Having a physically active lifestyle, having a diet abundant in fresh produce like fruits and vegetables, as well as moderate amount of protein and healthy fats from fish, can help one achieve a healthy weight range.

As in any cancer prevention regimen, it is always recommended to adapt a more plant-based way of eating with majority of food sources

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coming from whole food, minimally processed food, and mostly plant sources. The fiber and plant chemicals or phytochemicals found in fresh produce, whole grains, nuts, and seeds promote a healthy gut, decrease inflammation, and boost immunity.

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