

- Colorectal cancer

If you eat five ounces of red meat a day, you could get colon cancer

Ways to achieve healthy bowel habits

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They say that the eyes are the windows of the soul. But I say that your stool or poop is the window to your overall health. The frequency, shape, color of your stool will tell us if there is something off going on inside the body. For instance, when you're stressed out, you might get diarrhea. When you're dehydrated, you get constipated. When you have colon cancer, you get hard to pass, small goat-like stool that are no bigger than pebbles.



Colorectal cancer or cancer of the colon and rectum which are all part of the large intestine begin with a faulty immune system. Abnormal cells develop and clump together forming polyps. While these may not be cancerous, they can turn into tumors or cancerous growths over time. If the immune system is weak, it cannot fight cancer cells.

That is why it is important to ensure that we have regular bowel movement because we need to excrete all those toxins that will make us sick. These toxins compromise the immune system and our gut health.

A study conducted by Mitsuhashi, Shuji BS, and colleagues published in the American Journal of Gastroenterology in January 2018 entitled "Characterizing Normal Bowel Frequency and Consistency in a Representative Sample of Adults in the United States (NHANES)" concluded that normal bowel frequency is three bowel movements per day up to three bowel movements per week. How often do you move your bowels?

If you have irregular bowel movement or if the characteristic of your stool isn't formed, soft, and brown, then you have a problem.*

Here are some ways to establish healthy bowel habits:

Be physically active and exercise. Colorectal cancer prevention goes beyond diet. Exercise will help stimulate good peristalsis. These are involuntary wave-like movement of the muscles lining the gastrointestinal tract. If you have good peristalsis, your bowel movement will be more regular as this is the only way for food and wastes to move efficiently along the lengthy intestines to be absorbed and excreted from the body. A person who is on bed rest must still move occasionally from side to side as permitted. Otherwise, this could lead to difficulty in defecating or constipation.

Watch your caffeine intake. Now this can be tricky as some individuals find coffee to be a stimulant for bowel movement. Caffeine in coffee, tea, and chocolate products can promote muscle contractions down there. Too much caffeine intake, however, can also draw water away from your colon since it is a diuretic. It can make you pee more than usual. Too much intake of diuretics like caffeine can leave you dehydrated when fluids aren't properly replenished. This will result to hard stools or constipation.

Feed your gut microbiome. Our digestive tract is home to trillions of microbes that are beneficial to health. Unfortunately, stress, lack of quality sleep, unhealthy eating habits, substance abuse, too much medications, and lack of exercise can alter the balance in the gut microbiome. This will not only affect digestion, absorption of nutrients, and immunity. It will also impact your bowel movement. You can either have loose bowel movement or constipation. Therefore, it is important to feed our gut microbiome with prebiotics. These are the non-digestible and fermentable food ingredients that promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the gut. Examples are banana, psyllium husk,

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garlic, onion, eggplant, peas, legumes, soy, green tea, and whole grains like brown rice, oats, and quinoa. It is important to drink water every time you consume fiber to make sure that the fiber expands in your gut to facilitate the cleansing process. Otherwise, fiber with insufficient water intake will only lead to constipation.

Go meatless on most days. Harvard health publishing has cited a couple of large studies from Europe and the US as the best evidence that high consumption of meat, whether fresh or cured, salted, and processed is linked to increased risk of colon cancer. It is noteworthy to mention that the cause for concern is confined to red meat (pork, beef) and not chicken. The European research team tracked 478,000 cancer-free individuals. After almost five years of follow up, 1,329 people were diagnosed with colon cancer. Those who consumed five ounces or more of red meat a day were more likely to end up with colon cancer. Three ounces of red meat is about the size of a woman's palm. How much red meat do you consume? You may just be at risk of developing the big C even if you are not genetically predisposed.

Colorectal cancer is debilitating and fatal. Best to practice healthy bowel habits now before it's too late. It is also recommended to have colon cancer screening at the age of 50 years old or earlier if it runs in the family.

cheshireque@gmail.com