



COLON CANCER SCREENING

What is colon cancer?

Colorectal cancer is considered the third most prevalent cancer in the United States affecting more than 1.9 million people each year.

Colorectal cancer develops in the colon (also known as the large intestine) or the rectum. In the large intestine, we absorb water and salt and form waste matter or stool. Often, colorectal cancer begins with the discovery of growths known as polyps. There are various types of polyps, some of which may develop into cancer.

Colorectal cancer in individuals younger than 65 years of age has been steadily increasing since 2010 by a rate of 2-3% annually (6). According to research, modifiable risk factors contribute to more than 50% of all cases and deaths (5). For example, being overweight or obese is a known risk factor for developing colorectal cancer.

Additional modifiable risk factors include:

- Lack of physical activity
- Diets high in processed and packaged foods, industrial seed and vegetable oils, processed deli meats, and food cooked at very high temperatures (frying, broiling, grilling).
- Low-fiber diets or diets low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grain intake
- Lack of vitamin D
- Tobacco use
- Alcohol use
- Sleep deprivation and shift work

Non-modifiable risk factors include:

- 50+ years of age
- History of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease (i.e, Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease)
- Family history of colorectal cancer or polyps
- Being a carrier of genetic changes for hereditary colon polyps (Lynch syndrome)



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What is a colon cancer screening test?

Colon cancer screenings are traditionally accomplished with a colonoscopy, a medical procedure that uses a camera known as a colonoscope to visualize and assess tissue of the colon and rectum. The second most commonly used screening is the DNA stool test, which evaluates stool for cellular DNA changes that may indicate precancer or cancer.

When to screen?

Those with an average risk of developing colorectal cancer should speak with their physician and consider screening from age 45 to age 75. Those with an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer include anyone with one or more first-degree relatives with colon cancer or advanced polyps. Those with increased risk should consider screening and start getting colonoscopies at age 40 or 10 years before the age of the youngest relative at the time of their diagnosis (1).

Prevention Tips

Poor diet and lifestyle factors can contribute to the development of colorectal cancer. Here are tips to help prevent it:

1. Follow A Healthy Dietary Pattern

The Standard American Diet (SAD) is comprised of pre-packaged foods, refined grains, processed meats, and high sugar intake from soda, candy, and sweets. In contrast, the Mediterranean Diet is abundant in plant foods, olive oil as the primary fat source, and fatty fish (i.e., salmon, mackerel, sardines). Case-control studies report decreased odds of colorectal cancer associated with following the Mediterranean Diet eating pattern (4).

2. Support Your Microbiota

A diet rich in various plant foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, herbs and spices) supports the bacteria in the gut microbiota. Dietary fiber helps to reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer and reduces inflammation, while supporting gastrointestinal function (3).

3. Start talking about your poop!

While it can be a taboo subject, the consistency and quality of your daily bowel movement matter! If you begin to notice changes in your daily bowel movement, discuss them with your medical provider. These changes can include any of the following: diarrhea or constipation lasting more than a few days, a feeling that you still need to have a bowel movement after going, narrowing of the stool, or black tarry stools.

References

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3. Chen G. Y. (2018). The Role of the Gut Microbiome in Colorectal Cancer. *Clinics in colon and rectal surgery*, 31(3), 192-198.
4. Donovan, M. G., Selmin, O. I., Doetschman, T. C., & Romagnolo, D. F. (2017). Mediterranean Diet: Prevention of Colorectal Cancer. *Frontiers in nutrition*, 4, 59.
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6. Siegel, R. L., Miller, K. D., Wagle, N. S., & Jemal, A. (2023). Cancer statistics, 2023. *CA: a cancer journal for clinicians*, 73(1), 17-48.



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UHC Colorectal Screening Service

If you have UnitedHealthcare benefits through your employer, you have access to UHC's preventive colon cancer resources and support. UHC provides coverage for screening colonoscopies, virtual colonoscopies, sigmoidoscopies, and stool-based colon cancer screening. UHC also has three stool-based screening options.

1. Fecal DNA testing – an example of fecal DNA test is Cologuard®
2. Fecal immunochemical tests (FIT)
3. Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)



UnitedHealthcare will provide preventive coverage for fecal DNA testing for colon cancer screening for members age 50-75.

UHC members that are under age 45 or over age 75 do not qualify for preventive benefits with no cost sharing for fecal DNA screening under our Preventive Care Services CDG. For these members, cost-sharing would typically apply.

Colorectal cancer screening now recommended at age 45 | UnitedHealthcare (uhc.com)

How UHC members can find information about their coverage, claims or forms for colon cancer screening:

Search results for "colonoscopy"

1-18 of 18 results

Are you a member looking for information about your coverage, claims or forms?

Here's what to do:

1. Sign in or register for a member account.
2. Go to the Claims or Coverage and Benefits tab to view your plan details.

Select your plan to sign in ▾

Personal benefits and claims information is only available to view online after you sign in.

Colorectal cancer

Get more information on the types, symptoms, signs, and treatment of colon cancer.

Colorectal cancer screening now recommended at age 45

Both men and women are equally at risk for colon cancer. Learn more about how to spot the symptoms and when to get screened for help.

Does Medicare cover a colonoscopy?

Medicare Part B covers a colonoscopy either every 10 years or every 2 years depending on your health risk factors.

Colon cancer screening tests without the ouch

It's better to be safe than sorry. That's why Medicare covers non-invasive colon cancer tests every one to three years. Learn more about this pain-free at-home test.

FIT kit: home colorectal cancer screening

Learn about fecal immunochemical tests (FIT), an at-home alternative to a colonoscopy for people at normal risk for colorectal cancer.

5 questions to ask before a colonoscopy

Find tips to prepare for your colonoscopy, and important questions to ask before scheduling your appointment, so you can be prepared.

Cancer

Learn more about many forms of cancer, including breast cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, and more.

What to expect at your colonoscopy

What happens during a colonoscopy? Learn about what happens during a colonoscopy procedure so you know what to expect and how you can prepare.