

MSK Direct

What You Can Do To Prevent Colorectal Cancer



16 people every hour are diagnosed with
colorectal cancer in the United States.



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

Know Your Risk

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease, such as cancer. You or someone you care about may have a risk factor for colorectal cancer. Some risk factors never change, such as your age, race, health history, and your genes. However, there are healthy habits you can start to do in your day-to-day that can lower your risk.

You may be at risk for colorectal cancer if you:

- Are age 45 or older.
- Have had precancer polyps (a small cluster of cells found on the inside of your colon) on a screening test.
- Have inflammatory bowel disease, such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease.
- Have a close blood relative who was diagnosed with colorectal cancer before they were age 50.
- Have a family history of other cancers, such as stomach, urinary tract, pancreatic, uterine, and brain.
- Have certain changes in your genes, such as Lynch syndrome or familial adenomatous polyposis (A-deh-NOH-muh-tus PAH-lee-POH-sis). These conditions are rare causes of colon cancer that are hereditary (it runs in your family).
- Are overweight or obese.

Your race can also play a role in your risk for getting colorectal cancer. For example, in the United States, colorectal cancers affect the Black community at a higher rate than any other race.

There are more cases of colorectal cancer in the Black community than any other race.

What Does Colorectal Cancer Feel Like?

By 2030, colorectal cancer in people under age 50 is expected to nearly double.

Colorectal cancer often grows slowly over several years. It usually starts as a small abnormal (not normal) growth, called a polyp, on the inner lining of the colon or rectum. Some polyps later can become cancer.

Most people with early colorectal cancer do not have any symptoms. If you notice changes in your body, do not ignore them. Colorectal cancer most often affects people ages 50 and older. But there's an alarming rise in cases among people in their 20s and 30s. It is important to understand what is normal for your body so you can speak up and get care.

Make an appointment with your healthcare provider if you notice these symptoms and if they last for 2 weeks or longer:

- You see abnormal (not normal) bleeding from your rectum or blood in your stool (poop).
- You have diarrhea (frequent, loose stool), constipation (not being able to poop), or narrow stool (thin like a pencil).
- You feel an urge to poop that does not go away.
- You have pain in your abdomen (belly) that you can't explain.
- You are losing weight quickly and without trying.
- You often feel tired but you don't know why.

9 out of 10 people survive colorectal cancer when it is found and treated early.



Why Colorectal Cancer Screening Matters

There are many different types of screening tests for colorectal cancer. A colonoscopy is a well-known and effective test. It can find and remove small growths, including precancer polyps, from the lining of your colon or rectum. This means getting a colonoscopy regularly can find and prevent cancer.

MSK recommends that people at average risk for colorectal cancer start getting screened at age 45. Learn more about colorectal cancer screening at www.mskcc.org/colorectal_cancer_screening.

A colonoscopy is the best method for colorectal cancer screening. Other screening tests are available, such as ones that test your stool (poop). Stool tests are easier to do and can help find cancer. But they're not as good as a colonoscopy at finding growths that can become cancer. Depending on the results of your stool test, your healthcare provider may recommend a colonoscopy.

Colorectal screening catches cancer earlier when it's easier to treat.

Healthy Habits to Reduce Your Risk

When you turn age 45, it's time to schedule a colonoscopy and get one every year.

In between your screening tests, MSK recommends following these healthy habits to lower your risk of colorectal cancer.

- Eat less red, processed, burned, blackened, or charred meats. Bacon, hot dogs, deli meats, pepperoni, and ham are all examples of processed meats. Charred meats are cooked at high temperatures over a live flame, such as a charcoal or gas grill.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about whether taking aspirin is right for you. Some people who regularly use aspirin or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may have a lower chance of getting colorectal cancer and polyps.
- Maintain a healthy weight for your body.
- Eat a variety of foods high in fiber, including whole grains, legumes (beans, nuts, peas), fruits and vegetables.
- Limit foods with added sugars and trans or saturated fat.
- Do not smoke or use tobacco products. MSK's Tobacco Treatment Program has helped thousands of people to quit smoking. Our program is open to everyone, even if you do not have cancer.
- If you drink alcohol, limit how much you drink.

Actions You Can Take Today

- Learn about your risk for colorectal cancer.
- Know the symptoms of colorectal cancer and talk with your healthcare provider about any changes in your body.
- Get screened for colorectal cancer with regular colonoscopies after you turn age 45.
- Contact our MSK CATCH clinic at 833-920-3234 if you have a known hereditary cancer syndrome, such as Lynch syndrome. We help people living with a hereditary cancer syndrome at high risk for cancer monitor themselves for changes in their health. Close surveillance and regular cancer screenings help find cancer early when it's easier to treat.

MSK Direct

Your employer partners with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) — one of the top cancer hospitals in the nation, with more than 135 years devoted to exceptional patient care and cutting-edge medicine — to offer you MSK Direct.

With MSK Direct, you and your family have access to expert cancer guidance, no matter where you're located. MSK Direct is your pathway to the highest-quality cancer solutions and services for screening and prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and life after cancer for both adults and pediatric patients. Whether you have cancer, are concerned about your risk of cancer, or are a caregiver, MSK Direct is here for you.

The MSK Direct team is available to help you and your family make smart decisions about the best cancer care options, close to home. Call the MSK Direct dedicated phone number: [646-449-1515](tel:646-449-1515) or visit mskcc.org/direct/mskdirectforyou to learn more.



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