



# 10 Facts You Need to Know About Colon Cancer

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Whether you're concerned about colorectal cancer because it runs in your family or you're turning 45 and you've heard it's time for a colonoscopy, if you look at the facts, you'll see why **being screened for colon cancer is a life-saving decision**. Here are 10 facts you need to know about colorectal cancer:



## 1. Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in men and women in the United States

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Cancer Society estimate that more than 50,000 Americans die from colon cancer each year – that's nearly 140 people a day.



## 2. Colon cancer affects both men and women of all ethnicities

The lifetime risk of developing colon cancer is 4 – 5% in men and women, though men may get colon cancer at an earlier age than women. The risk of colon cancer increases with age. All races and ethnicities are at risk of colon cancer, but there is an increased risk among African-Americans.



## 3. Colon cancer may be inherited

People with a family history of colon cancer have two to five times more risk of having colon cancer. Some people may inherit colon cancer syndromes that increase their risk of developing the disease to nearly 100%. In anyone who has multiple family members with colon cancer or relatives diagnosed with colon cancer at a young age, genetic testing should be considered.



## 4. People with colon cancer may feel completely healthy

There may be subtle signs and symptoms if a person has colon cancer including fatigue, weakness, weight loss, abdominal pain and rectal bleeding. However, many people with colon cancer have no symptoms at all, especially during the early stages. This is why screening for colon cancer is extremely important.



## 5. Colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer

Most colon cancers develop from small growths in the lining of the colon and rectum, called polyps. Certain types of polyps grow over time and transform into cancer. Finding and removing these "pre-cancerous" polyps can prevent the colon cancer.



## 6. Colonoscopy is the most effective colorectal cancer screening test

There are several types of colorectal screening and detection tests, such as:

- Stool testing
- Radiological imaging (virtual colonoscopy)
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy

However, colonoscopy is the only test in which the entire colon can be visualized using a colonoscope and pre-cancerous polyps can be removed.

Cancer risk is reduced by 90% after colonoscopy and polyp removal, according to estimates from the American College of Gastroenterology. Cancer incidence has dropped by 30% after the widespread uptake in screening colonoscopy.

45+

## 7. All average risk people should have a screening colonoscopy as early as age 45

Colorectal cancer rates have been increasing in people under the age of 50. Due to this trend, the recommended age to begin screening colonoscopy was lowered from age 50 to 45 for average risk individuals.

Those at higher risk of colon cancer including people with a family history of colon cancer, inherited colorectal cancer syndrome, or a known predisposing gastrointestinal disorders. A screening colonoscopy usually is covered by insurance.



## 8. Colorectal screening saves lives

Early detection of colon cancer through screening can save a person's life. The 5-year survival rate after detection and treatment of early-stage colon cancer can be as high as 90%.

Unfortunately, the 5-year survival rate after treatment of late-stage colon cancer is as low as 12%. Treatment of colon cancer is much more effective and even curable if it is detected early.



## 9. Many Americans are not being screened for colon cancer when they should, despite the life-saving benefits

According to the CDC, up to a third of people are not up to date on current colorectal cancer screening recommendations. The majority of these people have never had any screening test performed.



## 10. Adopting healthy habits may help lower your colorectal cancer risk, too

A healthy diet that includes vegetables, fruits and whole grain fiber and is low in fats is associated with a lower risk of colon cancer. Avoiding tobacco and heavy alcohol use can decrease the risk of colorectal cancer. Regular physical activity and maintaining a normal body weight are beneficial as well.

**Now that you know the facts, talk to your primary care provider about your colorectal cancer risks and when you would need to be screened.**

### About the author



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Dr. Venu earned his medical degree at Saint Louis University School of Medicine. He completed a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in gastroenterology at the Medical College of Wisconsin Affiliated Hospitals.