Talk with your doctor

Family History and Genetics

People with a family history of colorectal cancer may have a greater risk than the general population. It is important to share your family's medical history with your doctor and to discuss it with other family members. It is also important to follow-up with your doctor. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, please call the Hereditary Colorectal Cancer Registry at the number given below for more information on cancer in families.

Resources

For more information for yourself, your family and your doctor. We suggest the following resources:

Web Sites

Johns Hopkins Hereditary Colorectal Cancer Registry
www.hopkins-coloncancer.org

The American Cancer Society
www3.cancer.org

Dr. Koop
http://netscape.drkoop.com/wellness/nutrition/

Publications

Potter JD. Colorectal Cancer: Molecules and populations (review article), Journal of the National Cancer Institute, 1999;91:916-932.

Cancer Facts and Figures-1999. American Cancer Society, Special section: Colon and Rectum Cancer, 1999:18-29.

Telephone

Johns Hopkins Hereditary Colorectal Cancer Registry
888-77-COLON (772-6566) / 410-955-3875

Johns Hopkins Cancer Risk Assessment Program
410-614-6319

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Dietary and Lifestyle Changes to Reduce Your Colorectal Cancer Risk

The Johns Hopkins
Hereditary Colorectal Cancer
Registry

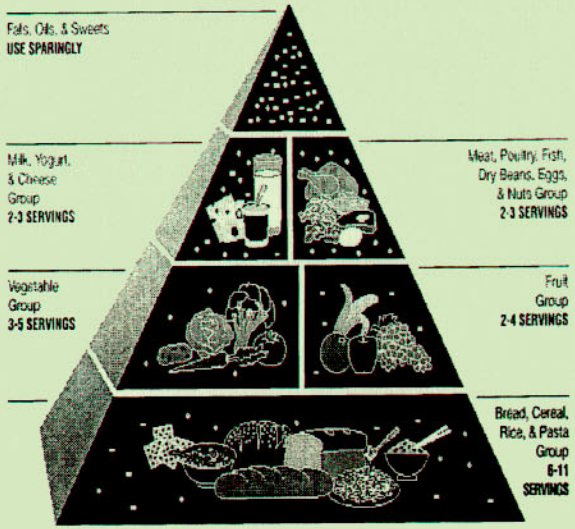
550 N. Broadway Suite 108
Baltimore, MD 21205

Cancer occurring in the colon or rectum (colorectal cancer) is one of the most common cancers in the United States. It occurs in both men and women, most often over the age of 50. The exact causes of colorectal cancer are not known. However, studies have shown that changes in your diet and lifestyle can decrease your risk of developing colorectal cancer.

USDA Food Guide Pyramid

The American Cancer Society recommendations for a healthy diet are consistent with the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. Although no diet can guarantee full protection against any disease, the Food Pyramid offers the best nutritional information currently available to help Americans reduce their risk of cancer.

Daily Food Choices



Dietary Changes

Fruits and vegetables

The American Cancer Society recommends eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Diets rich in raw, green, dark yellow, and cruciferous (cabbage family) vegetables are best.

Fiber

Fiber forms bulk that keeps things moving through the colon, preventing constipation. It fills you up, aids digestion, and lowers cholesterol and blood pressure. A high fiber diet includes vegetables, whole grains, and beans. High fiber (starchy) vegetables include potatoes, lima beans, green peas, winter squash, corn, yams and sweet potatoes. Whole grains are brown rice, barley, millet, and quinoa. Beans are lentils, chick peas, great northern-navy-lima-beans, and split and black-eyed peas (prepared without meat or grease).

Meats

The American Cancer Society recommends no more than six cooked ounces of lean meat, fish and poultry per day. Avoid red, processed, cured or fried meat with heavily browned surfaces.

Fats

Limit your intake of high fat foods. Avoid foods high in saturated fats/animal fats. Reduce your total amount of dietary fat to less than 30 percent of your total calories per day. Use low fat cooking methods such as steaming, broiling and baking.

Calcium

Be sure you are getting enough calcium in your diet. Good sources of calcium include milk, yogurt, broccoli, and grains. Take supplements if needed.

Folate

A daily multivitamin containing folic acid or folate may lower colorectal cancer risk.

Lifestyle Changes

Physical activity

Increased physical activity is one way people can decrease their risk for colorectal cancer. Small amounts of exercise on a regular basis can be helpful. The American Cancer Society recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity three times a week.

Maintain a healthy weight/low body mass

Decreasing obesity can be achieved by maintaining a healthy weight through a healthy eating plan using the USDA Food Pyramid and exercise.

Avoid smoking

There is an increased risk of developing pre-cancerous colorectal polyps in persons with a long smoking history.

Avoid excessive alcohol.

There is an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer in persons with a history of excessive alcohol intake, regardless of the type of drink.

Other Changes

NSAIDs

(non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)

Studies suggest that taking NSAIDs (such as aspirin and ibuprofen) reduces the risk of colorectal cancer. These medications work by reducing polyp formation. Not everyone should take NSAIDs. Talk to your doctor about whether this is right for you and if so, how much should you take.

Estrogen Replacement Therapy

Studies show that ERT (estrogen replacement therapy) may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer by one-half in post-menopausal women. The decision to take estrogen should be based on discussions of the benefits and risks with your doctor.