



## Can Colorectal Cancer Be Prevented?\*

Even though we don't know exactly what causes colorectal cancer, there are some steps you can take to reduce your risk.

**Screening tests:** Regular colorectal cancer screening or testing is one of the best ways to prevent colorectal cancer. Some polyps, or growths, can be found and removed before they have the chance to turn into cancer. Screening can also help find colorectal cancer early, when it is more likely to be cured.

People who have a history of colorectal cancer in their family should check with their doctor for advice about when and how often to have screening tests.

**Genetic testing, screening and treatment for those with a strong family history:** People with a strong family history of colorectal polyps or cancer should think about getting genetic counseling to help them decide whether genetic testing or earlier screening may be right for them.

**Diet and exercise:** People can lower their risk of getting colorectal cancer by taking charge of the risk factors that they can control, such as diet and exercise. It is important to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods and to limit intake of high-fat foods. Getting enough exercise is also important. The American Cancer Society recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity on 5 or more days of the week. Forty-five to 60 minutes of exercise on 5 or more days of the week is even better.

**Vitamins:** Some studies suggest that taking a daily multivitamin containing folic acid or folate can lower colorectal cancer risk. Other studies suggest that getting more calcium and vitamin D can help. One recent study suggested that a diet high in magnesium may also reduce colorectal cancer risk in women. However, not all studies have found these supplements to reduce risk. More research is needed in this area.

**Aspirin and other drugs:** Aspirin and drugs such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxen (Aleve), appear to prevent the growth of polyps. A drug called Celebrex also reduces polyps for some people with FAP. These medicines, though, can have serious or even life-threatening side effects such as stomach bleeding. For this reason, experts do not advise the general public to take them to try to prevent colorectal cancer. If you are at high risk for colorectal cancer, talk to your doctor about what you should do.

**Female hormones:** Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in women after menopause may reduce their risk of getting colorectal cancer. However, those women on HRT who do get colorectal cancer, may have a fast growing cancer. The decision to use HRT should be based on a careful discussion of benefits and risks with your doctor.

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