



## What Causes Colorectal Cancer?

### **Risk Factors You Cannot Change**

**Age:** The chances of having colorectal cancer go up after age 50. More than 9 out of 10 people found to have colorectal cancer are older than 50.

**Having had polyps or colorectal cancer before:** Some types of polyps increase the risk of colorectal cancer, especially if they are large or if there are many of them. If you have had colorectal cancer (even if it has been completely removed), you are more likely to have new cancers start in other areas of your colon and rectum. The chances of this happening are greater if you had your first colorectal cancer when you were younger than age 60.

**Having a history of bowel disease:** Two bowel diseases, called *ulcerative colitis* and *Crohn's disease*, increase the risk of colon cancer. In these diseases, the colon is inflamed over a long period of time. If you have either of these diseases, your doctor may want you to have colon screening testing more often.

**Family history of colorectal cancer:** If you have close relatives who have had this cancer, your risk might be increased. This is especially true if the family member got the cancer before age 60. People with a family history of colorectal cancer should talk to their doctors about when and how often to have screening tests.

**Certain family syndromes:** A syndrome is a group of symptoms. For example, in some families members tend to get a type of syndrome called FAP that involves having hundreds of polyps in their colon or rectum. Cancer often develops in 1 or more of these polyps.

If your doctor tells you that you have a condition that makes you or your family members more likely to get colorectal cancer, you will probably need to begin colon cancer testing at a younger age and you might want to talk about genetic counseling.

**Race or ethnic background:** Some racial and ethnic groups such as African Americans and Jews of Eastern European descent (Ashkenazi Jews) have a higher colorectal cancer risk.



## **Risk Factors Linked to Things You Do**

Several lifestyle-related factors have been linked to colorectal cancer. In fact, the links between diet, weight and exercise and colorectal cancer risk are some of the strongest for any type of cancer.

**Certain types of diets:** A diet that is high in red meats (beef, lamb or liver) and processed meats such as hot dogs, bologna and lunch meat can increase your colorectal cancer risk. Cooking meats at very high heat (frying, broiling or grilling) can create chemicals that might increase cancer risk.

**Lack of exercise:** Getting more exercise may help reduce your risk.

**Overweight:** Being very overweight increases a person's risk of dying from colorectal cancer.

**Smoking:** Most people know that smoking causes lung cancer, but long-time smokers are more likely than non-smokers to die of colorectal cancer. Smoking increases the risk of many other cancers, too.

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