Colon Cancer Can Be Stopped

Colorectal cancer, or colon cancer, occurs in the colon or rectum.

The colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus.

Colon cancer, when discovered early, is highly treatable. Even if it spreads into nearby lymph nodes, surgical treatment followed by chemotherapy is highly successful.

In the most difficult cases — when the cancer has spread or metastasized to the liver, lungs or other sites — treatment can prolong and add to one’s quality of life.

Most colon cancers develop first as colorectal polyps, which are abnormal growths inside the colon or rectum that may later become cancerous.

Colon cancer affects men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, and is most often found in people 50 years or older.

It is the third most common cancer in the United States, behind only lung and prostate cancers in men and lung and breast cancers in women, and the second leading cause of cancer death.

It is estimated that 50,830 people died of colon cancer in 2013.

But the truth is it doesn’t have to be this way. If everyone 50 years or older had a regular screening test, as many as 80% of deaths from colon cancer could be prevented.

—Colon Cancer Alliance

Screening is the No. 1 way you can reduce your risk of colon cancer. Don’t put it off!
Blame It on Your Family

About 10% of the population has a first-degree relative with colon cancer.

First- and second-degree relatives (children, siblings, grandchildren, nieces, nephews) of a person with a history of colon cancer are more likely to develop this disease themselves, especially if the relative had the cancer at a young age.

If many close relatives have a history of colon cancer, the risk is even greater.

Because of this, the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force recommends screening starting at age 40 for these high-risk individuals.

What Did I Do Wrong?

Other factors contributing to these young diagnoses have not been definitely identified.

We do know they’ve been occurring alongside an increased prevalence of obesity and diabetes – two known colon cancer risk factors.

Other factors that may increase your risk of colon cancer include:
- Certain types of diets
- Inactivity and obesity
- Smoking cigarettes
- Heavy alcohol use

What’s Race Got To Do With It?

Jews of Eastern European descent (Ashkenazi Jews) may have a higher rate of colon cancer.

Partly because of fewer screenings, African-American men and women have a 20% higher risk of developing colon cancer and a 45% lower survival rate compared with most other races.

The risk of death is also increased for Native Americans.

I Will Survive (And You Can Too)

- The 5-year survival rate for colon cancer found in just the colon and rectum is 90%.
- The 5-year survival rate for colon cancer found when it has spread to nearby tissue is 70%.
- The 5-year survival rate for colon cancer that has spread to other organs is 12%.