



## Online Resources

**Your Disease Risk**  
[yourdiseaserisk.wustl.edu](http://yourdiseaserisk.wustl.edu)

**Zuum – Health Tracker**  
[zuum.wustl.edu](http://zuum.wustl.edu)

**8ight Ways to Prevent Cancer**  
[8ightways.org](http://8ightways.org)

**SmokeFree.gov**  
[smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov)

**NIH – Body Mass Index Calculator**  
[nhlbisupport.com/bmi](http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi)

**American Cancer Society**  
[cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

**Surgeon General – My Family Health Portrait**  
[familyhistory.hhs.gov](http://familyhistory.hhs.gov)

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## TO PREVENT COLON CANCER

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TOPREVENT COLON CANCER

Colon cancer doesn't get the same attention as some higher-profile cancers, but it should. It's the third most common cancer in the United States — with 140,000 people diagnosed each year. And over a million men and women live with a history of the disease.

Then there's the good news about colon cancer: **It can be prevented.** Seventy-five percent of all cases could be avoided by things you can do.

Use these eight tips as a guide to lowering your risk. Start with one or two and build from there. **It's your health. Take control.**

## 1 Get screened

Getting regular screening tests for colon cancer is the single best way to protect yourself from the disease. It can catch cancer early, when it's most treatable, **and** help prevent the disease by finding abnormal growths called polyps that can turn into cancer.

There are a number of effective screening tests for colon cancer. Some are easy to do but need to be done more often. Others are more involved but need to be done less often. Which test you have depends on your personal preferences and medical history. A doctor can help you decide.

Most people begin getting tested at age 50. People with a family history of colon cancer or other important risk factors may begin testing at younger ages and get tested more often.



The colon (or large intestine) is the last part of the digestive tract.

### CHOOSE ONE OF THESE RECOMMENDED SCREENING OPTIONS.

If a test finds anything suspicious, a follow-up colonoscopy is usually needed.

#### Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)/ Fecal immunochemical test (FIT)

How often: **every year**

Tests that look for hidden blood in the stool, which can be a sign of cancer. The test is quick and easy. You just take small samples of your stool at home, which are then sent to a lab to be tested.

OR

#### Colonoscopy

How often: **every 10 years**

A small flexible tube with a camera at the end is used to examine the full length of the inside of the colon. You are sedated for the test, so you need a ride home afterward. If the exam finds polyps or other suspicious growths, they can be removed during the test.

OR

#### Flexible sigmoidoscopy

How often: **every 5 years**

An exam similar to a colonoscopy that uses a small flexible tube to examine the lower part of the colon (the sigmoid). You don't need to be sedated for a sigmoidoscopy.

OR

#### Virtual colonoscopy

How often: **every 5 years**

A type of CT scan that creates a precise 3D image of the inside of the colon. During the test, a small tube is inserted into the rectum to gently inflate the colon with air. The scan itself takes just a few minutes.

### Getting ready for a screening test

Screening tests like colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy require special steps beforehand to clear out the colon. This usually means a simple diet of clear liquids a day or two before the test, then the use of a laxative or enema the night or morning before.

## 2 Maintain a healthy weight

Except for smoking, nothing else raises the overall risk of cancer more than being overweight. At least 11 different cancers have been linked to weight gain and obesity, including colon cancer. An ideal goal is to weigh around what you did when you were 18 years old. Realistically, if you've put on weight, the first goal is to stop gaining weight — which has health benefits by itself. Then, for a bigger health boost, slowly work to lose some pounds.

## 3 Don't smoke

It hardly needs saying anymore, but not smoking is the single best thing you can do for your health. On top of raising the risk of serious diseases like heart disease, stroke, and emphysema, smoking is a major cause of at least 14 different cancers, including colon cancer. If you do smoke, quitting has real benefits, which start shortly after your last cigarette. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov) for help. Talking to a doctor can double your chances of success.

## 4 Be physically active

It's hard to beat regular activity. It lowers the risk of many serious diseases, including colon cancer, and provides a good mental boost. Any amount of physical activity is better than none, but it's good to shoot for around 30 minutes or more of moderate activity each day. Choose things you enjoy, like brisk walking, cycling, dancing, or gardening.

## 5 Drink only moderately, if at all

Alcohol is a strange thing when it comes to health. It's heart-healthy in moderation but can up the risk of colon and other cancers at even low levels. So what does this mean? If you drink moderately (up to one per day for women, two per day for men), there's likely no reason for you to stop. If you don't drink, though, there's no reason for you to start. Heavy drinkers should try to cut down or quit.

### Other important risk factors for colon cancer

Though colon cancer is very preventable, there are still a number of important risk factors that people can't control. Knowing which ones apply to you can help you understand your risk and take steps to lower it. If you feel you're at high risk, talk to a doctor or health professional. These can increase colon cancer risk:

- Older age, especially 60 years or over
- Family history of colon cancer
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Being tall (5'8" or taller for women; 5'11" or taller for men)

**75% of all cases could be avoided by things you can do.**

## 6 Limit red meat, especially processed meat

Eating too much red meat — like steak, hamburger, and pork — increases the risk of colon cancer. And processed meats — like bacon, sausage and bologna — raise risk even more. Try to eat no more than three servings each week. Less is even better.

## 7 Get enough calcium and vitamin D

There is good evidence that getting enough calcium and vitamin D can help protect against colon cancer. Shoot for 1000 to 1200 mg per day of calcium and about 1000 IU per day of vitamin D. Some groups recommend testing for vitamin D deficiency, especially in those at increased risk of low levels — such as those living in northern parts of the country as well as the elderly, very overweight, and people with darker skin.

## 8 Consider a multivitamin with folate

A daily multivitamin is a good nutrition insurance policy that can also help protect against colon cancer. In addition to calcium and vitamin D, multivitamins also contain folate, which has been shown in numerous studies to lower the risk of colon cancer. Avoid mega-dose vitamins. A standard multivitamin is all you need.

### What about aspirin?

For most men ages 45 to 85 years old and women ages 55 to 85 years old, a daily low-dose aspirin is recommended to lower the risk of heart attack. And there is good evidence that long-term use of aspirin can also lower the risk of colon cancer. Aspirin can have some important risks, however, so it's important to talk to a doctor before taking it regularly.

