

# Colon Cancer: What You Can Do to Prevent It

## Colon Cancer: Who has it?

About 149,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with colorectal cancer each year, making it the third most common cancer in the U.S. and causing an estimated 55,170 deaths.

- Approximately six percent of all adults—or one in 17 people—in the U.S. will develop colon or rectal cancer in their lifetime.
- Cancers of the colon and rectum are just as common in women as in men.
- Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

## What are the risk factors for colon cancer?

**Age:** The chance of developing colorectal cancer increases after age 50.

**Hereditary factors:** People with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, polyps or bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease) are at increased risk.

**Environmental factors:** A diet high in fat, lack of exercise, being overweight, smoking and heavy use of alcohol increase risk.

## What role does diet play?

Considerable research suggests that eating a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains and limiting high-fat foods can help prevent colon cancer. Specific nutrients that may play a role in lowering colorectal cancer risk are folic acid (or folate), magnesium, calcium and vitamin D.

Numerous studies have shown a protective effect of low-fat milk and milk products against colon cancer. Calcium and vitamin D may work together to reduce colorectal cancer risk, as vitamin D aids in the body's absorption of calcium.

- Calcium, which has demonstrated anti-cancer effects in many studies, is a likely factor in dairy's protective effect. However, other components in dairy foods may play a role as well.
- Calcium intakes of 1200-1500 milligrams per day—or about 3-4 servings of dairy products a day—seem to be the most protective.

- Calcium may prevent cancer cells from dividing and may ensure normal growth of colon cells.

Conversely, several dietary factors—such as eating a low-fiber, high-fat diet and drinking alcohol—may increase the risk of developing colon cancer.

## Simple ways to increase intake of dairy products

In addition to the research showing that milk and dairy foods may protect against colon cancer, studies have indicated these foods play an important role in preventing osteoporosis, high blood pressure and even obesity. In general, the effects from dairy foods are greater than from calcium supplements alone, suggesting there are other components in dairy foods that have protective effects.

Calcium is one of the nutrients most likely to be lacking in the American diet. More than two-thirds of all adults fail to meet the minimum calcium recommendation of 1000-1200 milligrams per day, or about 3-4 servings of milk and dairy foods. One cup of low-fat milk or yogurt or 1-1/2 oz. of cheese provides approximately 300 milligrams of calcium.

## Here are a few quick and easy ways to add dairy products to your diet:

- Drink low-fat or fat-free milk instead of soda.
- Add grated cheese to baked potatoes.
- Use yogurt as a dip for raw vegetables.
- Eat yogurt for a mid-afternoon snack.
- Add a slice of low-fat mozzarella cheese to sandwiches.
- Add low-fat milk instead of water to soups, sauces, gravies and hot cocoa mix.
- Grate low-fat cheese in salads and soups.
- Order a latte instead of plain coffee.
- Make a smoothie with fruit, yogurt and juice.
- Top pancakes and waffles with yogurt.



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