

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Colorectal cancer ranks third among the cancers men and women develop in the U.S. Yet scientists estimate that dietary changes could prevent up to 75 percent of these cases. This month, take steps to reduce your risk of developing this highly preventable cancer.

Fiber-Rich Foods First

Traditional diets composed mainly of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, such as those eaten in Asia, appear to help prevent colon cancer. For a long time, the fiber in these foods has been considered a vital colon cancer fighter.

But now large studies that followed people for years cast doubt on this thinking. Mostly plant-based diets seem more important for the antioxidant vitamins and phytochemicals they contain. For example, vegetables high in folate, like leafy greens, seem to offer particular protection from colon cancer, especially for those who drink alcohol.

Cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli and cauliflower, possess phytochemicals that may prevent damage to the DNA in colon cells by stimulating enzymes that convert carcinogens to inactive forms.

Other Factors That Affect Risk

Convincing evidence links exercise with 40-50 percent reduction in colon cancer risk. Exercise may protect the colon because it speeds the movement of food through the intestine and decreases bile acid secretion. The American Institute for Cancer Research, (AICR) recommends an hour a day of moderate activity that raises the heart rate and causes a slight perspiration, like a brisk walk.

Insulin Resistance is also a prime suspect now. In this condition, higher levels of insulin circulate because the body is less responsive to it. Insulin and related growth factors seem to change cell processes in ways that promote the development of cancer. Insulin resistance could explain why inactive and overweight people, especially with excess weight around the waist, are more likely to develop colon cancer.

Vitamin D, which comes from milk, fatty fish and the sun, has been linked to lower colon cancer incidence. Twenty minutes of daily sun exposure provides the recommended amount of vitamin D.

Lastly, meat cooked at high temperatures seems to increase risk. Well-cooked meats contain carcinogenic substances called heterocyclic amines (HCAs). Studies show that people who frequently eat well-browned meat containing high levels of HCAs have an increased risk of colon cancer.

Prevention Includes Screening

Beginning at age 50, you should receive the following colon screening tests. If you have a family history of colon problems, are overweight, smoke or eat a diet low in fiber and

high in saturated fat, you may need screening tests more often or at an earlier age. Talk to your doctor:

Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) every year

Plus...Sigmoidoscopy every 5 years

*Or...*Colonoscopy every 10 years

*Or...*Double contrast barium enema (DCBE) every 5 to 10 years.

*Also...*a digital rectal exam (DRE) should be done at the same time as sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy or double contrast barium enema.

To order AICR's free, updated brochure on colon cancer, call 800-843-8114, ext. 110 and request *Reducing Your Risk of Colorectal Cancer*.

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