

Colon Cancer Ranks Third

By the American Institute for Cancer Research

Among the cancers men and women develop in the U.S., colon cancer ranks third. Yet scientists estimate that dietary changes could prevent up to 75 percent of these cases. While a high-fiber, low fat diet is considered crucial, getting enough folate, vitamin D and exercise, as well as avoiding meat cooked at high temperatures, are also important.

Fiber First

Traditional diets composed mainly of fiber from vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans, such as in Asia, appear to help prevent colon cancer. Although scientists are not sure how, three theories exist. First, fiber is thought to counteract cancer-causing conditions in the large intestine by speeding up the transit time of waste. Second, fiber absorbs bile acids, which researchers have claimed to be an important factor in preventing colon cancer. The amount and type of fat in the diet strongly influence the amount of bile acids in the colon. Third, fermentation of fiber in the colon creates a byproduct called butyrate, which has anticancer effects.

Other Factors That Lower Risk

Vegetables (especially leafy greens) fruits and beans provide both fiber and **folate**, a B vitamin and essential nutrient. Because the body stores only a small amount of folate, a healthy diet must regularly include foods that contain it. Diets with a folate deficiency – even if they are low in fat and high in fiber – are associated with colon cancer risk.

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

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.

Lastly, convincing evidence links **exercise** with a 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.

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

Or - Double contrast barium enema (DCBE) every 5-10 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 1-900-843-8114, ext. 10, and request *Reducing Your Risk of Colorectal Cancer*.