

6 healthy steps to preventing colon cancer

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Colon cancer can be a devastating diagnosis, but there are a number of steps you can take to reduce your risk of tumors, an expert says.

[Colorectal cancer](#) is the third-leading cause of cancer in the United States, and the American Cancer Society estimates that 106,180 cases of [colon cancer](#) and 44,850 cases of rectal cancer will be diagnosed in 2022. It's estimated that there will be 52,580 colorectal cancer deaths in the United States this year.

"When people are healthy, they don't think about preventing illness," said Dr. Vi Chiu, director of gastrointestinal oncology and molecular precision programs at Cedars-Sinai's The Angeles Clinic and Research Institute in Los Angeles.

"But this old adage is still true: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We have the tools to prevent this disease," Chiu added in a Cedars-Sinai news release.

As part of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March, Chiu outlines six ways to reduce your risk of colorectal cancer.

- **Get screened.** When detected early, colorectal cancer is highly treatable. Adults at average risk for colorectal cancer should begin screening at age 45, while those with parents, grandparents and siblings who have had colorectal cancer should begin screening at age 40, or 10 years before the diagnosis of the youngest first-degree relative. The three main types of screening are colonoscopy, fecal immunochemical test (FIT)-DNA test, and FIT-only test. [Colonoscopy](#) "is the gold standard for detecting precancerous growths," Chiu noted. "I strongly recommend it over other screening options."
- **Diet.** Research shows that diets rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains are associated with a lower risk of colon or rectal cancer. Try to eat only small amounts of beef, pork and lamb, and eat fewer processed meats, like hot dogs. Eat [whole grains](#), such as oatmeal, brown rice, popcorn and whole-wheat bread,

Chiu advised. Adequate vitamin D intake is also important. A large international study found that people with low levels of [vitamin D](#) had a higher risk of getting colorectal cancer.

- **Get active.** Exercise could reduce the risk of colorectal cancer because it may reduce inflammation in the body and boost the immune system, according to Chiu.
- **Watch your weight.** Being overweight or [obese](#) increases the risk of colorectal cancer.
- **Avoid or limit alcohol.** "[Alcohol](#) can cause intestinal damage. It is a toxin whose byproduct can damage DNA," Chiu said. "The gut may develop inflammation, and the gut immunity is weakened. This can lead to colorectal [cancer](#) development." Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one drink per day.
- **Don't smoke.** A 2020 study in the *British Journal of Cancer* found that smokers had a 59% higher risk of [colorectal cancer](#) and former smokers had a 19% higher risk, Chiu said. People who stopped smoking more than 20 years ago did not have an increased risk.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [colorectal cancer prevention](#).

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