

# Knowing Risk Factors Can Prevent Colon Cancer

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Colorectal cancer is the third biggest cancer killer in the United States, killing an estimated 50,000 people every year, according to the American Cancer Society.

It doesn't have to be that way. Early detection can reduce the colon-cancer death toll through prevention and treatment.

Regular colonoscopies can catch [colon polyps](#) before they have a chance to turn into cancer. Head of [Gastroenterology](#) at National Jewish Health, Phillip Hanna, MD, recommends that people with no identified [risk factors](#) should begin regular colonoscopies at age 50. Those who have risk factors for colon cancer should be screened earlier and more frequently.

Dr. Hanna identifies the following risk factors for colorectal cancer, which suggest earlier and more frequent detection efforts:

- **Family history.** Colon cancer is known to be passed down genetically, so if your family has a history of colon cancer it is important that you get screened in your 40s.
- • **Race.** The highest incidence and death rates of colon cancer are seen in African Americans. Dr. Hanna recommends that all African Americans, both men and women, begin screening for colon cancer at age 45.

- **Smoking.** Mounting evidence suggests that smoking increases the risk of colon cancer.
- **Diet.** Studies show that diets that are heavy in red and processed meats and low in fruits, vegetables and grains are associated with a higher incidence of colon cancer.
- **Lifestyle.** People who exercise regularly appear seem to have a decreased risk of [colon cancer](#). Conversely, inactive lifestyles may be associated with an increased risk.

Provided by National Jewish Health

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