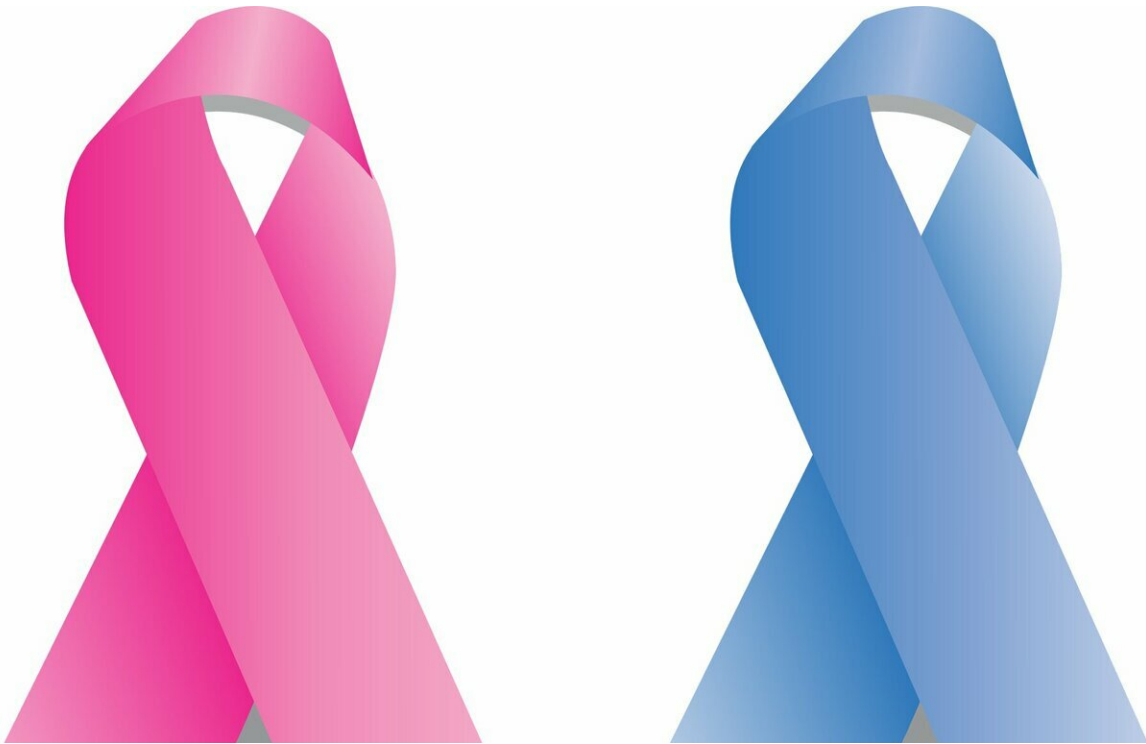


Five things you can do to keep your colon healthy

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For years, turning 50 came with a special birthday message from your health care provider: Time to have a colonoscopy.

Now that message will be coming a bit sooner. The American Cancer Society recently updated those screening guidelines, recommending most

people get their first colonoscopy at age 45.

Colon cancer rates have been increasing in younger people. The change in the guideline is designed to help catch those cancers earlier, when they're more likely to be curable.

Whatever your age, there are 5 other steps you can take to avoid developing colon cancer, the third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.:

1. Eat your veggies and healthy fats.

"Research has shown that the Western diet correlates to higher colon cancer rates," says Salwa Bakkali-Derksen, D.O., an internal medicine provider at Mayo Clinic Health System in Owatonna, Minnesota.

"People who eat high-fiber diets are less likely to develop the disease." She also recommends limiting the amount of meat you eat, especially processed meats.

Dr. Bakkali-Derksen emphasizes the importance of consuming healthy fats found in [olive oil](#), salmon rich in Omega-3, avocados and nuts, as well as limiting low-processed fats found in fried food.

2. Get moving.

You know exercise benefits your heart and can help you maintain your weight. It also may lower your risk of developing some types of cancer, including colon cancer. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week.

3. Watch your weight.

According to the American Cancer Society, carrying extra pounds

increases your risk of [colon](#) cancer, as well as cancers of the breast (in [postmenopausal women](#)), rectum, esophagus, pancreas and kidney, among others. Talk to your provider if you need help losing weight.

4. Limit alcohol and don't smoke.

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so moderately. That means no more than one drink a day for women or two drinks a day for men. And if you smoke, quit. Your provider can offer tips or refer you to a program to help you stop.

5. Follow screening guidelines.

It's so important that we're going to end where we began. One of the most important cancer prevention strategies is to follow the [colon cancer screening guidelines](#) that are right for you based on your age, risk factors and family history.

A colonoscopy is more than a screening tool. It can actually prevent cancer by discovering precancerous changes, called polyps, and removing them before they develop into [cancer](#).

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