
March Is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Among cancers that affect both men and women, **colorectal cancer** (cancer of the colon or rectum) is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Every year, about 140,000 Americans are diagnosed with colorectal cancer, and more than 50,000 people die from it.



How Can You Reduce Your Risk?

The risk of getting colorectal cancer increases with age. More than 90% of cases occur in people who are 50 years old or older. Colorectal cancer screening saves lives, but many people are not being screened according to national guidelines.

If you're 50 years old or older, getting a screening test for colorectal cancer could save your life. Here's how—

- Colorectal cancer screening tests can find precancerous polyps so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. In this way, colorectal cancer is prevented.
- Screening tests also can find colorectal cancer early, when treatment often leads to a cure.

What Are the Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?

Precancerous polyps and colorectal cancer don't always cause symptoms, especially at first. You could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it. That is why having a screening test is so important. Symptoms for colorectal cancer may include—

- Blood in or on the stool (bowel movement).
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that do not go away.
- Losing weight and you don't know why.

These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer. If you're having any of these symptoms, the only way to know what is causing them is to see your doctor.

When Should You Begin to Get Screened?

You should begin screening for colorectal cancer soon after turning 50, then keep getting screened regularly until the age of 75. Ask your doctor if you should be screened if you're older than 75.

Some people are at a higher risk than others for developing colorectal cancer. Having any of these things may increase your risk—

- Inflammatory bowel disease.
- A personal or family history of colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- Genetic syndromes, like familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (also known as Lynch syndrome).

If you think you may be at high risk for colorectal cancer, talk to your doctor about when and how often to get tested.

What Are the Screening Tests for Colorectal Cancer?

Several tests are available to screen for colorectal cancer. Some are used alone; others are used in combination with each other. Talk with your doctor about which test or tests are best for you. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends these tests to screen for colorectal cancer—

- Colonoscopy (every 10 years).
- High-sensitivity fecal occult blood test (FOBT), stool test, or fecal immunochemical test (FIT) (every year)
- Sigmoidoscopy (every 5 years).

How Can I Pay for Screening Tests?

Many insurance plans and Medicare help pay for colorectal cancer screening. Check with your plan to find out which tests are covered for you. To find out about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program provides access to colorectal cancer screening to low-income, underinsured, or uninsured men and women aged 50–64 years in 25 states and four tribes.

Screen for Life: National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign

CDC's Screen for Life: National Colorectal Cancer Action Campaign informs men and women who are 50 years old or older about the importance of having regular colorectal cancer screening tests.

Multiple Academy Award® winner Meryl Streep joins the *Screen for Life* campaign, appearing in new public service announcements (PSAs). Ms. Streep talks about how much there is in life that we can't control, but says here's something we can: colorectal cancer. She describes her own screening experience, and urges men and women to get screened beginning at age 50.

These new PSAs are the latest additions to a rich suite of *Screen for Life* resources for patients and health professionals. Print materials, including fact sheets, brochures, and posters, can be viewed, printed, and ordered online. Television and radio public service announcements can be viewed and heard online.