

Preventing Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is a devastating disease that invades the large intestine of approximately 22,000 Canadians each year. It is a cancer that presents no signs and symptoms early on, and can grow undetected long before a problem is noticed. And when symptoms do occur – diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, unexplained weight loss, bloody stools – they are not much different from symptoms of other cancers: these symptoms are very vague and indicative of a vast number of other illnesses as well.

Colorectal cancer does not discriminate, and even the healthiest individual can develop the disease. However, there are several lifestyle factors which you can control to help prevent this ailment.

To lower your risk of developing colorectal cancer:

- Fruits & Vegetables:** Consume a diet high in a variety of fruits and vegetables. Green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli and spinach are highly recommended for their nutritional content and whole fruits are excellent sources of carbohydrates to consume. They contain important antioxidants (see below), minerals, and vitamins that are essential for our existence.
- Red/Processed Meat:** Limit your intake of red and processed meats because studies have identified cancer causing agents (carcinogens) not only in processed meat, but in a diet that is rich in red meat (ie beef, pork, lamb, veal) Carcinogens are also produced when red meat is burnt during the cooking process and then subsequently ingested. Consider alternative sources of protein such as poultry, low-fat dairy products, legumes, and fish.
- Grains/Legumes:** Replace refined grain food products made of white flour to whole grain food products made of whole grains such as oats, barely, and whole wheat; or consume these grains in their natural form.
- Water:** Drink plenty of water to help your body's digestive processes. Aiming to drink six to eight medium glasses of fluid daily can help to prevent sluggish bowels. Beverages such as tea, coffee, and fruit juices count towards fluid intake, and may bring with them other nutrients or benefits.
- Trans Fats:** Replace unhealthy fats called trans fats (found in cakes, cookies, fried foods, margarine, donuts, pastries and chips) and saturated fats (found in butter and red meat), with healthy fats called unsaturated fats (found in fatty fish like salmon, avocados, olive oil, and nuts). To get more good fats in your diet, cook with oils, such as olive oil, and choose foods such as nuts, avocados and fatty fish over well done red meats.
- Sugar/Glycemic Index/Glycemic Load:** Recent studies performed at Harvard Medical School found that men and women who consumed high amounts of foods that increased blood sugar levels had a higher chance of getting colorectal cancer in the future, compared to those men and women who ate lesser amounts of such foods.

Following these helpful tips, quitting smoking and enjoying regular physical activity will contribute to a long and healthy life!

