

Healthy People

March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers in both men and women. The risk of the disease increases with age. More than 90% of cases are diagnosed in people age 50 and older. The good news is that it's one of the few cancers that can be prevented through early detection testing. If you get screened (tested) regularly – before you have symptoms – growths in the colon (called polyps) can be found and removed before they have the chance to turn into cancer. Early detection tests can also help find colorectal cancers when they're small and easier to treat.

The American Cancer Society recommends that men and women at average risk start colorectal cancer screening at age 50. Some people may be at higher risk based on their family health history and need to start testing earlier. Ask your doctor when you should start screening for colorectal cancer and which test is right for you.

Currently, millions of people who should be screened for colorectal cancer are not getting the recommended tests. To help reduce those numbers, 500-plus organizations, including the American Cancer Society and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), are working together to increase the percentage of people getting screened for colorectal cancer in the United States to 80% by 2018.

To learn more about what your employees and their families can do to prevent colorectal cancer – and all cancers, visit cancer.org or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345. They're available when you need them – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Learn Your Family's Health History

About 96% of Americans believe that knowing their family's health history is important to their own health – that it could, in fact, help save their lives. But only one-third of them have ever tried to gather and organize their families' health history, according to the US Department of Health & Human Services.

Your doctor can use your family health history to:

- Estimate your risk for certain medical conditions.
- Recommend treatments and lifestyle changes.
- Determine what tests and screenings you should have.
- Identify conditions that otherwise might not be considered.
- Assess possible health risks for your children.

Ideally, your family health history should include the following information about each relative for at least 3 generations:

- Sex (male/female)
- Date of birth (the approximate year of birth is usually enough)
- Current age or, if the relative is no longer living, cause of death and age at death
- Diseases or medical conditions (including any history of colon polyps)
- If the relative had cancer (What type? How old were they when they were diagnosed?)
- Any known behavioral factors, including diet, exercise, smoking and drinking habits, and any weight problems

Here are some websites that might be helpful if you are interested in putting together your family's health history:

Mayo Clinic [Instructions for Compiling Family Medical Tree](#)

Colon Cancer Alliance [Family Health History Tree - Free Download](#)

Surgeon General's Family Health History Initiative [My Family Health Portrait Tool](#)