

Five Signs of Colorectal Cancer You Shouldn't Ignore – Even if You're a Younger Adult

With March being Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the American Cancer Society urges the public to be watchful for common signs and symptoms of the disease and understand your risk.

ATLANTA, March 1, 2024 — In the recent [Cancer Facts & Figures 2024](#) report from the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS), researchers revealed a stark increase in colorectal cancer (CRC) incidence among Americans under the age of 55. In fact, in just two decades, CRC has moved up from being the fourth leading cause of cancer death in people under 50, to first in men and second in women. For Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the ACS urges people to be on the lookout for five of the top potential warning signs of CRC:

- A change in bowel habits such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool that lasts more than a few days
- Blood present in the stool or the toilet
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Unexplained, sudden weight loss
- Fatigue that does not go away or that keeps coming back

“Many symptoms of colorectal cancer can appear similar to symptoms brought about by other issues, such as infection, hemorrhoids, or irritable bowel syndrome, said Dr. Laura Makaroff, senior vice president, cancer prevention and early detection at the American Cancer Society. “It’s critical to speak with your doctor and get checked if you are experiencing any of the symptoms above.”

Reducing your risk:

Most CRCs develop from colon polyps. Getting regular screening tests is one of the most powerful tools for preventing CRC because it can find polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer. Currently, only about 20% of individuals age 45-59 receive CRC screenings. The ACS [recommends](#) people at average risk start regular screening at age 45. Several test options are available for CRC screening, including stool-based at-home tests and visual exams such as a colonoscopy. “Those who have a family history of CRC or who have family members who have had adenomatous polyps (the kind of polyps that can become cancer) are also linked to a higher risk of CRC,” Makaroff adds. “Individuals with a family history or genetic predisposition should begin screening before age 45 years to reduce risk.”

Several lifestyle factors such as body weight, physical activity, diet, and alcohol and tobacco use can also play a role in your risk for CRC:

- **Weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight may help lower your risk, as being overweight or obese increases the risk of colorectal cancer for both men and women.
- **Physical activity:** Engaging in regular exercise and increasing the overall amount and intensity of your physical activity can lower the risk of colorectal cancer.
- **Diet:** Studies have shown that diets high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, and low in red and processed meats, likely lower CRC risk. Several studies have also found higher risk of CRC with increased alcohol intake, specifically in men.
- **Smoking:** Long-term smoking has been shown to lead to an increased risk of colorectal cancer.

The ACS and the [Colorectal Cancer Alliance](#) (Alliance) are joining forces on [Your Colon is 45](#) - an initiative aimed at promoting colorectal cancer screening for individuals aged 45 and above. Visit [YourColonIs45.org](#) for resources on colorectal cancer prevention, including a personalized screening quiz, a doctor locator, and an e-card to remind friends and loved ones to get screened.

For more information on CRC detection and diagnosis, visit [cancer.org](#).

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About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 100 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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