



Your Family History & Colon Cancer

In Oregon, colon cancer is the third most common cancer.* Nationally, one in four people have a family history of colorectal cancer. If you have a parent, brother, sister, or child with colon cancer, your chance of developing colon cancer is at least double that of someone with no family history.**

The more people in your family who have had colon cancer, the higher your chance of getting colon cancer. Also if those family members got cancer at a young age that puts you at an even greater risk.

If you know of a family member who has had colon cancer, then you may want to write down your family health history.

What is a Family Health History?

Like cancer, many health problems run in families. Families share their habits, environments, and lifestyles, as well as their genes.

A Family Health History is a record of you and your close family's health. By taking your family health history and sharing it with your doctor, you can learn what health problems you may be at higher risk for and how to prevent or reduce your chances of developing colon cancer.

What can you do if you think you have a family history of colon cancer?

- » Use the Surgeon General's family history tools: My Family Health Portrait can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>
- » The next time you go to your doctor, take your family history with you and share it with your doctor.
- » Take action to reduce other things that put you at risk for getting colon cancer.



Besides family history, here are some other things that may put you at risk for colon cancer:

- Being overweight, having a poor diet, smoking, and/or too little physical activity
- Risk increases with age. People 50 and older are at highest risk
- Being Ashkenazi Jewish
- Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Colon polyps
- Ovarian, breast, or endometrial cancer

Things you can do to prevent colon cancer:

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Eat a balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats.
- Get active. Moderate activity 30 minutes at least 5 days of the week has big benefits.
- Quit smoking and lower you risk of other cancers too.
- Talk to your health care provider about your family history and screening
 - If you have a parent, brother, or sister with colon cancer, national guidelines recommend screening at 40 years or 10 years before the youngest case in the family.**
 - If you have 2 or more aunts/uncles or grandparents with colon cancer, guidelines also recommend earlier screening.
 - Your doctor can review your family health history and see what screening is right for you.
- Cancer risk assessment and genetic counseling. If you have a strong family history of cancer, your doctor may send you to a genetic counselor. A genetic counselor can do a cancer risk assessment to see if other screening or testing should be done.



Where can I learn more?

Oregon Genetics Program
www.healthoregon.org/genetics

Colon Cancer Alliance
<http://www.ccalliance.org/>

Colorectal Cancer Coalition
<http://www.fightcolorectalcancer.org/>

CDC National Office of Public Health Genomics
www.cdc.gov/genomics

US Surgeon General Family History Website
www.hhs.gov/familyhistory

"This is not just knowledge for knowledge's sake. Knowing your family health history can save your life, as well as the lives of those you love." 2006 Acting Surgeon General Kenneth P. Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H.

**Oregon
Genetics
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* Oregon State Cancer Registry, Cancer in Oregon, 2003

**National Cancer Institute, PDQ, Genetics, October 2006 (www.nci.nih.gov)

***National Comprehensive Cancer Network Colorectal Cancer Screening Practice Guidelines v.1.2007

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