

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center

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Call [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225)

Available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Eastern time)

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# What are the risks for colon cancer that I can control?

The following risk factors increase your chance of developing colon cancer:

- a diet high in red, processed, or charred meats
- a lack of exercise
- obesity, particularly extra fat around the waist
- smoking (studies show that smokers are 30 to 40 percent more likely to die of colorectal cancer)
- drinking too much alcohol

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## What are the risks for colon cancer that I can't control?

### Age

Most colon cancers occur after age 50 (unless there is a family history of the disease or a hereditary cause). However, in recent years there has been a troubling rise in colon cancer rates among people as young as their 20's and 30's.

[Learn more about Colon Cancer Before 50.](#)

### Family History of Lynch Syndrome or Familial Adenomatous Polyposis

Some inherited disorders dramatically increase your risk of developing colon cancer. These include Lynch syndrome and familial adenomatous polyposis. Learn more about these and other inherited conditions that affect your risk of colon cancer as well as our genetic testing services.

[Learn more about genetic testing for colon cancer.](#)

### History of Cancer

If you've had colon cancer before, you're at an increased risk of having it again.

### History of Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Inflammatory bowel diseases, such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's colitis, increase your risk of colon cancer.

### Family History of Cancer

You have an increased risk of colon cancer if:

- a close family member, such as a parent or sibling, had colon cancer before age 50
- several blood relatives have had colon cancer
- there is a family pattern of certain other cancers, including endometrial, ovarian, gastric, urinary tract, brain, and pancreatic cancers

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## How can I lower my risk of colon cancer?

There are a number of risk factors for colon cancer. You can address some by changing your behavior but others you can't change. Making healthier choices in your everyday life can help reduce many of these risks.

MSK recommends these healthy habits, which may lower your risk of colon cancer:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and fiber, and less animal and fat. The American Cancer Society recommends that you eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Choosing such foods as beans and whole-grain bread, cereal, grain, rice, and pasta is a great way to improve your diet. Foods rich in calcium and folic acid (such as legumes, citrus, and broccoli) may also reduce your risk of colon cancer.
- Exercise regularly. Even moderate regular physical activity — such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, raking leaves, or walking — can help reduce your risk of colon cancer.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Obesity is an important risk factor for colon cancer.

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## Does aspirin reduce the risk of colon cancer?

Some people who regularly use aspirin or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may have a lower risk of colon cancer and polyps. Aspirin may also help prevent polyp growth in people who were previously treated for early-stage colon cancer or who previously had colon polyps removed.

You should only take aspirin under a doctor's direction. Research suggests that not all people benefit. Also, NSAIDs can have serious side effects. Aspirin can cause stomach bleeding in some people, and drugs such as celecoxib (Celebrex®) may increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.



### Does an Aspirin a Day Reduce the Risk of Colorectal Cancer?

MSK gastroenterologist Robin Mendelsohn weighs in on the possible benefits and drawbacks of using aspirin to reduce the risk of colon and rectal cancer.

[Learn more](#)

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## Does hormone replacement therapy reduce the risk of colon cancer?

Hormone-replacement therapy (HRT) consists of estrogen and progesterone. Women who use HRT after menopause may have a reduced risk of colon cancer. However, HRT can potentially cause other health problems. Talk to your doctor to learn more about the benefits and risks of HRT.

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