

COLON CANCER

COLORECTAL CANCER

WHAT IS COLON CANCER?

Colon cancer occurs when cell DNA becomes damaged, causing healthy cells to continue to divide and grow when they are not supposed to. As these cells accumulate they form a tumour, which can then invade and destroy healthy tissue nearby or travel (metastasize) to other parts of the body. Colon cancers can develop for a variety of risks, including modifiable risks, like nutrition, activity, smoking and alcohol use, as well as non-modifiable risks, like age, genetics & family history. Proper screening can reduce risk of developing colon cancer by up to 75%.

WHY IS NUTRITION IMPORTANT FOR COLON CANCER?

Preventing any type of cancer is not as simple as eating a specific food; however, about **one-third of all cancers can be prevented by eating well, being active and maintaining a healthy weight**. It has been shown that by eating lots of plant foods (think: vegetables, fruit, whole grains and beans/legumes), as well as reducing intake of refined sugars and processed meats, you can reduce your risk of developing colon cancer.

TO START REDUCING YOUR RISK OF COLON CANCER TODAY:

1. Eat foods that are high in fibre. Fibre helps to bulk your stool, speed up movement of food through the colon and keep the bowels and digestive system healthy. All plants are higher in fibre including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and legumes.
2. Cut back on alcohol & processed foods. This can contribute to weight gain, and may displace intake of food important to protect against cancer.
3. Get active! Every little bit counts. Taking breaks from sitting, walking at lunch, or doing an activity you love can help to reduce your risk.
4. Talk to your doctor to learn more about your risk, and follow cancer screening guidelines. This means that men and women age 50 and over should have a stool test at least every 2 years.

SYMPTOMS

Colon cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canada. It is the second leading cause of death from cancer in men and third leading cause of death from cancer in women. Diagnosing the disease can seem long and tedious because many tests are commonly used to rule out or diagnose other health conditions, which can cause similar symptoms to colon cancer.

Many people have no symptoms in the early stages of the disease. When symptoms do appear, they'll likely vary depending on the size and location of the tumour. Some common symptoms include:

- Blood in stool
- Persistent change in bowel habits (diarrhea or constipation, or stool that looks more narrow than normal)
- Persistent abdominal discomfort (cramps, gas or pain)
- A feeling that your bowel doesn't completely empty
- Weakness, fatigue or anemia (low iron)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Loss of appetite

Your family doctor will start by taking a health history and physical exam, followed by blood and stool tests as a part of routine screening. Other commonly used tests for diagnosis include a colonoscopy, biopsy, digital rectal exam and imaging techniques (CT scan, ultrasound, MRI), which are all used to determine the cause of the medical issue or to diagnose colon cancer.

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PRACTICAL NUTRITION CHANGES YOU CAN MAKE TODAY	THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE...	I DO THIS X TIMES PER WEEK	I WILL START BY INCREASING THIS TO X TIMES PER WEEK
Increase vegetables (GOAL: Aim for 2 cups of vegetables at lunch and supper EVERY DAY)	These foods are full of fibre, antioxidants and polyphenols.		
Reduce intake of simple carbohydrates (GOAL: Swap white/processed grains for brown/whole grains at home and when eating out)	These foods are full of fibre, are often lower in simple sugars and carbohydrates		
Reduce red & processed meat (GOAL: decrease to consuming 2-3 times per week)	Processed meats are high in salt, nitrates, and fat. Red meat in > 18 oz/week increases colon cancer risk.		
Reduce alcohol intake (GOAL: be realistic & talk with your doctor about usual intake)	Alcohol damages the entire GI tract and contributes to weight gain.		
Eat pulses! (aim for ½ cup of pulses a week)	Pulses are chickpeas, beans, lentils, and legumes. They are high in fibre & phytochemicals.		

*recipe ideas and inspiration can be found at www.ignitenutrition.ca

NEED MORE HELP? SEE A DIETITIAN FOR INDIVIDUALIZED CARE.

Have you been diagnosed with polyps or are at risk of colon cancer?

At Ignite Nutrition, our team of registered dietitians are trained in medical nutrition therapy and specialize in gut and digestive health. Seeing a dietitian can help you come up with a specific and individualized plan to best manage YOUR symptoms.

To get the nutrition and lifestyle support you need, visit www.ignitenutrition.ca or call 403-808-2348 to book your appointment today!