

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
Topic: Risk Factors

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month! To raise awareness and educate our community, the Cancer Resource Centers of Mendocino County offers this second in a series of four news articles. Our goal is to stress that colorectal cancer is highly preventable and treatable. By following recommended screening guidelines beginning at the age of 50 and making healthy nutritional and lifestyle choices, risk of developing this disease may be lowered.

Our first article in this series covered early symptoms and recommended screening guidelines. Today's topic will focus on risk factors. Research has shown that people with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop colorectal cancer.

The following lists risk factors taken from the National Cancer Institute website, www.cancer.gov.

Risk Factors:

- People age 50 and older: Colorectal cancer is more likely to occur as people get older. More than 90 percent of people with this disease are diagnosed after age 50. The average age at diagnosis is 72.
- Colorectal polyps: Polyps are growths on the inner wall of the colon or rectum. They are common in people over age 50. Most polyps are benign (not cancer) but some polyps (adenomas) can become cancer. Finding and removing polyps may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.
- Family history of colorectal cancer: Close relatives (parents, brothers, sisters, or children) of a person with a history of colorectal cancer are somewhat more likely to develop this disease themselves, especially if the relative had the cancer at a young age.
- Personal history of cancer: A person who has already had colorectal cancer may develop colorectal cancer a second time. Also, women with a history of cancer of the ovary, uterus (endometrium) or breast are at a somewhat higher risk of developing colorectal cancer.
- A long history of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease.) A person who has had a condition that causes inflammation of the colon (such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease) for many years is at increased risk of developing colorectal cancer.
- Diet: Studies suggest that diets high in fat (especially animal fat) and low in calcium, folate, and fiber may increase the risk of colorectal cancer. Also, some studies suggest

that people who eat a diet very low in fruits and vegetables may have a higher risk of colorectal cancer.

- Cigarette smoking: A person who smokes cigarettes may be at increased risk of developing polyps and colorectal cancer
- Genetic Alterations: Changes in certain genes increase the risk of colorectal cancer. 1) Hereditary nonpolyposis colon cancer (HNPCC) is the most common type of inherited (genetic) colorectal cancer. It accounts for about 2 percent of all colorectal cancer cases. It is caused by changes in an HNPCC gene. 2) Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) is a rare, inherited condition in which hundreds of polyps form in the colon and rectum. It is caused by a change in a specific gene called APC. Unless FAP is treated, it usually leads to colorectal cancer by age 40. FAP accounts for less than 1 percent of all colorectal cancer cases.

Additional risk factors in developing colorectal cancer:

- People who are overweight or obese, especially those who carry fat around their waists
- People who aren't physically active
- People who drink alcohol in excess
- People who eat a lot of red meat (such as beef, pork or lamb) or processed meat (such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs or cold cuts.)

As stressed in our first news article on colorectal cancer, prevention through screening is key in detecting and removing polyps that develop in the colon and rectum. Since colorectal cancer is more likely to occur as people get older (50+) it is important to know that all people with Medicare are eligible for a screening colonoscopy. All other colorectal screenings are available to people with Medicare age 50 and older. See the Medicare.gov website for more detailed information.

The next article in this series will emphasize preventative strategies through screening; our final article in the series will emphasize lowering risk through nutrition and lifestyle choices.

If you would like to be screened for colorectal cancer, please contact your health care provider. If you are seeking a health care provider, contact the Mendocino Coast Clinics at (707)-964-1251 or North Coast Family Health Center at (707)-961-4631. For more information and available resources on colorectal cancer or any other cancer, contact the Cancer Resource Centers of Mendocino County at 937-3833 or 800-449-6483 (Coastal office) or 467-3828 (Inland office) or visit our website at crcmendocino.org.