Colon cancer: It’s not something most of us want to talk about, but having a candid conversation with your doctor about your risk for the disease – and when you should get tested – could save your life.

Regular screening is the best way to find colon cancer early. Some screening tests may even be able to prevent colon cancer entirely, by finding certain growths in the colon called polyps that can be removed before they become cancerous.

When should you start getting tested?

People who have no identified risk factors – other than age – should begin testing at age 50. If you have other conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, or if your family members have had colon cancer, you should talk with your doctor about starting earlier.

Colonoscopy is the most well-known screening test for finding cancer and precancerous polyps, but there are several different tests that can find colon cancer. Ask your doctor which tests are available where you live and which option is best for you.

You can also lower your chances of getting colon cancer by watching your weight, avoiding alcohol, and staying physically active. Research also shows that eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables may help lower your risk of colon cancer, while a diet high in processed and/or red meats has been linked with a higher risk.

Colon cancer signs and symptoms

If you notice a change in bowel habits, dark stools, rectal bleeding, cramping/abdominal pain, or persistent weakness and fatigue, see your doctor right away. Most of these symptoms are likely to be caused by conditions other than colon cancer, but because they could also be signs of colon cancer, you should get checked out immediately.

Don’t wait – you have a much better chance of fighting colon cancer if it’s found early.

To help lower your chances of getting colorectal cancer:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Be physically active.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Eat a diet with a lot of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and less red or processed meat.
How to Handle Fatigue

"Fatigue" is feeling tired – physically, mentally, and emotionally. It means having less energy to do the things you normally do or want to do. Fatigue can last a long time and can affect your daily routine and relationships.

Whether brought on by work, family, social demands, illness such as cancer, or even a simple head cold, fatigue can make even small things seem overwhelming. To conserve your energy, decide which things are most important to do and focus on them. Let the other stuff go.

Feeling tired may be linked to feeling depressed and anxious; try activities that help you relax like walking on a beach, meditating, or gardening. Or it may help to find something that distracts you. Listen to music, read a book, or hang out with friends or family.

And even if you’re feeling tired, try to get some exercise. Aerobic and strength-training programs – with your doctor’s OK – can give you an energy boost, improve your health, and make you feel better about yourself. Exercise can also help you sleep more soundly, which in turn increases your energy level. Even a short walk can make a big difference.

If nothing seems to be helping, talk to your doctor.

Fitness with Friends

Some days, taking time to exercise can seem like a serious chore. If you’re feeling burned out on your solo routine or are finding it harder to get motivated to move as much as you should, it may be time to find an exercise buddy.

Exercising with a friend offers a host of different benefits:

- **Accountability:** You are much more likely to put your workout clothes on if you know someone is counting on you to show up.
- **Encouragement:** Peers can be there to offer you support when you hit a plateau and help you push yourself to the next level.
- **Camaraderie:** That 3-mile course will go by in a blink if you and a buddy spend your time swapping stories as you run.

So find a pal and share some fitness time. You may find exercising becomes your favorite part of the day!

Running Wild: Should you go barefoot?

There’s been a fair amount of hype in the last year or so about the benefits of barefoot or “minimalist” running. Should you try it?

Barefoot enthusiasts claim that barefoot running puts less stress on knees and joints. Many also say they enjoy the stimulation and exhilaration of running barefoot.

But some podiatrists aren’t so sure you should throw away your running shoes just yet. Of course, there’s the obvious risk of injury from stepping on rocks, twigs, or glass. And some argue it can cause problems such as plantar fasciitis.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), there’s not enough research to say whether barefoot running has any immediate or long-term benefits. APMA recommends that individuals consult a podiatrist with a strong background in sports medicine about the pros and cons of barefoot running.

If you want to give barefoot running a try, experienced barefoot runners recommend easing into it. Start with a racing flat (lightweight athletic shoe) or one of the “minimalist” shoes. This way you can toughen up your feet and ankles. Again, be sure to talk with a podiatrist or your doctor first.

CLICK HERE for more ways to get active.
Carbs: Friend or foe?

From bread baskets to bowls of tortilla chips, carbohydrates, or “carbs,” are diet busters for many folks. But not all carbs are bad. In fact, the right carbs can be an important part of a healthy diet.

There are two types of carbs: simple and complex. “Simple” carbs are more easily digested by the body and can be found in fruits, dairy, and processed, refined foods like sugar, pasta, and white bread. “Complex” carbs take longer for the body to break down and are found in vegetables, whole-grain pasta and bread, brown rice, and legumes.

You don’t have to give up carbs to have a healthy diet; the key is choosing wisely. American Cancer Society nutrition guidelines recommend avoiding processed and refined carbs in favor of complex ones whenever possible. Here are some easy ways to fit in more of those:

- Use 100% whole-grain bread or wraps instead of white bread for sandwiches
- Choose oatmeal or oat cereal for breakfast
- Substitute brown rice for white rice
- Add whole barley to soups and stews or bulgur to salads and casseroles
- When snacking, go for low-fat microwave popcorn, whole-wheat crackers with low-fat cheese, or low-fat, whole-grain muffins.

What counts as a drink?

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits

While there may be some positive benefits of drinking, if you don’t normally drink, experts say you don’t need to start in order to improve your health. Talk with your doctor about lifestyle choices, such as diet and exercise, that can keep your body fit, and be sure to get the tests for cancer, heart disease, and diabetes recommended for your age and gender.
Pass the peas, please!

Often the first vegetable given to babies, peas are frequently displaced from the dinner plate later on. While they have a bad rap, peas can be a tasty and nutritious addition to any meal. Whether of the English, snow, chick, black-eyed, or sweet variety, peas are a good source of dietary fiber and protein, are low in fat and are cholesterol-free. They’re also loaded with magnesium, iron, zinc, and folate.

You don’t just have to serve them with carrots, either. Eat raw sugar snap peas as a snack with a cool yogurt dip. Try blanching sweet peas, combining them with pesto, and serving over pasta. Add peas to soups, stews, stir-fries, or salads for an extra nutritional kick. Or purée them with garlic, mint, and Parmesan and serve underneath grilled fish or chicken. Any way you like them, pile ‘em high!

Harvest Ham Primavera

In a large stockpot, cook pasta according to package directions. Drain pasta, return to pot, and stir in olive oil. Add ham steak cubes to pasta and cover to keep warm.

In a large skillet that has been lightly sprayed with cooking spray, sauté onion until tender. Add yellow pepper and snow peas, cook 1 minute, and add to pasta. Mix tomatoes into hot pasta.

In small skillet over medium-high heat, bring milk to a gentle boil. Stir in cream cheese until it melts. Add cornstarch mixture and 1 tablespoon of Parmesan cheese. Cook 1 to 2 minutes more, or until thickened. Pour over pasta mixture and stir gently until mixed thoroughly.

Transfer to heated serving dish. Top with remaining Parmesan cheese and chopped chives.

Serves 8.

- 1 16-ounce box pound bowtie pasta (farfalle)
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 8-ounce ham steak, trimmed well, cooked and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 medium red onion, sliced finely
- 1 medium yellow bell pepper, sliced finely
- ¼-pound snow peas, blanched in hot water for 1 minute
- 2 Roma tomatoes, diced
- 1 cup 1% milk
- 1 tablespoon onion and chive fat-free cream cheese
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch dissolved in 1 tablespoon 1% milk
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated, divided
- 2 tablespoons chives, chopped

Cooking spray

CLICK HERE to order and for dozens of other delicious recipes in The American Cancer Society’s Celebrate Cookbook.

In the Next Issue: • Tips for a Healthier Passover • A Cold or Allergies? How to Tell • Workout Playlist Ideas

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