

Colon cancer

The most preventable cancer

In our lifetimes, we have a one in 14 chance of developing colon cancer. And the odds get worse as we age. By the time we approach age 70, our chance of developing colon cancer increases to nearly 20 percent. In the United States, colon cancer is No. 2 on the list of killer cancers, claiming 60,000 lives each year.

Nobody has to have colon cancer But those numbers don't have to be so high. Anthony Simons, MD, a colorectal specialist at Longview Surgical Group, says colon cancer is the most preventable of all cancers.

Research shows that virtually all colon cancers begin as small, noncancerous polyps in the bowel. These tiny, cauliflower-shaped polyps transform very slowly, taking years to develop into cancerous tumors.

Because the change is so slow, colon cancer is beatable. Colon cancer is sometimes referred to as the "cancer that nobody has to have." But to win the fight, we have to understand our role in protecting ourselves.

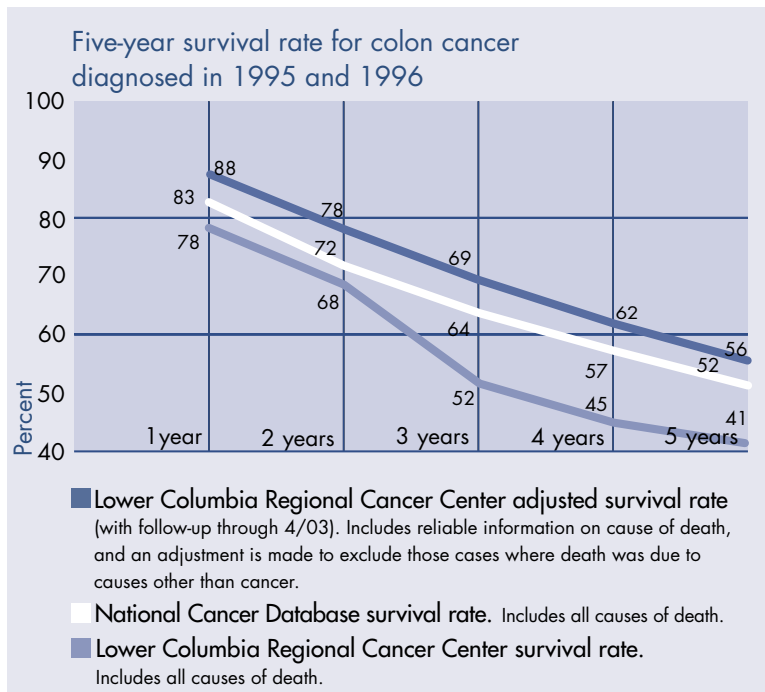
Don't wait to have a checkup Dr. Simons says, "Don't wait to see symptoms of colon cancer before you have yourself checked. By the time you see evidence of bleeding, smaller stools, vomiting, or stomach pain, the cancer may be more advanced and more difficult to treat."

After age 50, you should make colon screening a regular part of your preventive health plan. Several methods are available. The simplest and least invasive is a yearly fecal occult blood test, in which a swipe from a stool sample is analyzed for telltale evidence of blood.

Every five years you should request a flexible sigmoidoscopy, a procedure that allows the doctor to use a tiny camera to inspect the last two feet, or last third, of your colon. Although it is not as thorough as a full colonoscopy, the sigmoidoscopy is effective because three out of five colon cancers occur in those final 24 inches. Any polyps that are discovered with the sigmoidoscope can be removed during a follow-up colonoscopy.

Colonoscopy is highly effective, allowing the physician to conduct a thorough examination of the entire length of the colon while removing polyps along the way. Colonoscopy becomes more important every year, as four out of five colon cancers are diagnosed in patients over 60.

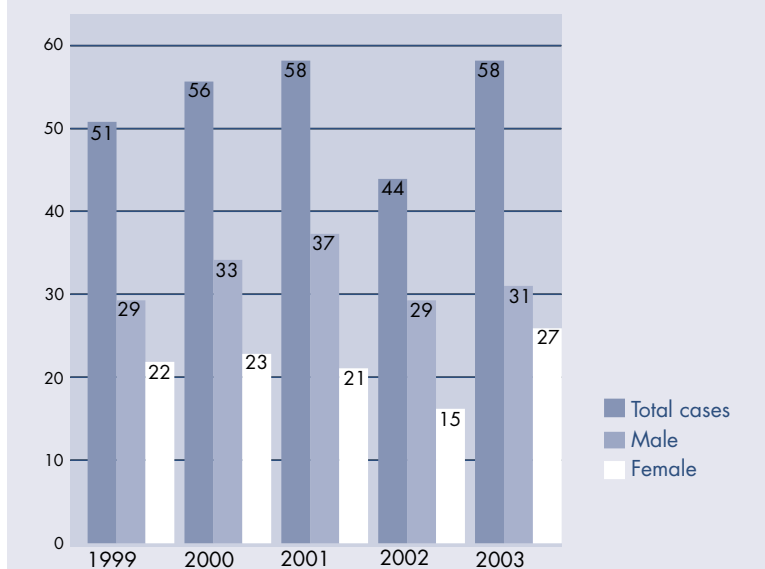
Make sure you survive In addition to having medical checkups, you can minimize your risk for colon cancer by limiting consumption of fat; eating fruit,



Colorectal cancer in our community, 1999 to 2003

Total number of cases = 267

Female = 108 Male = 159



fiber, and green leafy vegetables; and getting plenty of exercise. Research suggests that it may be helpful to take 325 milligrams of aspirin each day.

There is good news about survivability in our community. Nationally, the observed five-year survival rate for colon cancer is 52 percent. The Lower Columbia Regional Cancer Center reports an adjusted survival rate of 56 percent.