

# Colon Cancer Awareness & Prevention

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Colorectal Cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the country, and Nebraska has one of the highest incidences of colorectal cancer in the United States. Colon cancer is an equal opportunity diagnosis. Both men and women of all racial and ethnic groups are at risk, but it occurs more frequently in people who are obese. There are several ways to help reduce your risk and prevent colon cancer. Many of these strategies focus on healthy lifestyle practices such as eating healthy, limiting alcohol, not smoking, and being physically active.



## How to Reduce your Risk:

**Eat healthy.** One way to lower your risk is to eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and whole grains from breads, cereals, and pastas. The 2010



*Dietary Guidelines for Americans* stress limiting refined carbohydrates (starches), such as pastries, sweetened cereals, and other high-sugar foods.

**Focus on folate.** Folate is a B vitamin that helps produce and maintain new cells. It may also help prevent changes to DNA that may lead to cancer.



Eat foods with folate more often, such as leafy green vegetables like spinach and turnip greens, fruits such as citrus fruits and 100% juices, and dried beans and peas.

**Toss tobacco.** Based on several studies of groups of people followed over many years, smoking appears to double the risk of colon cancers. If you use tobacco, quit as soon as possible.



If you do not use tobacco, do not start. Visit [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org) and [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) for resources on quitting.



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**Be active.** The American Cancer Society recommends that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity most days of the week. You can even break it up into 10-minute segments throughout the day. Moderate exercise such as walking, gardening, or climbing steps may help reduce your risk. Examples of vigorous activity include jogging or running, fast bicycling, circuit weight training, aerobic dance, martial arts, jumping rope, or swimming.



## Possible symptoms of colon cancer may include:

- Blood in or on the stool (bowel movement)
- A change in bowel habits
- Stools that are narrower than usual
- General, unexplained stomach discomfort
- Frequent gas, pains, or indigestion
- Losing weight and you don't know why
- Chronic fatigue

## Risk factors:

- Eating a low-fiber, high fat diet
- Being overweight/obese
- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol use
- An inactive lifestyle
- A family history of colon or rectal polyps or colorectal cancer
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)
- Genetic syndromes



The following are recommendations for those 50 years of age and older. The recommendations are to use one or a combination of the following tests for persons at average risk:

- Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) every year
- Sigmoidoscopy every 5 years
- Colonoscopy every 10 years
- Double Contrast Barium Enema (DCBE) every 5-10 years

**Know how. Know now.**

### Early detection is key:

- If detected early, 90% of colon cancer cases are curable. However, because there may be no symptoms, many do not get checked.
- The Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program titled “*Stay in the Game*,” urges individuals to take a simple at-home test using a free test kit available from the Panhandle Cancer Coalition and the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program.
- The Colon Cancer distribution and awareness campaign is for *Nebraska* residents. Funding for this program is from the Nebraska Colon Cancer Program through the Office of Women’s and Men’s Health at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

### How to get a free test kit:

- **Scotts Bluff County residents:** If you are a Nebraska resident in Scotts Bluff County and between the ages of 50 and 74 years old, contact Martha Stricker, RN, BSN, Nurse Manager - Community Health at (308) 630-1559 or [strickm@rwmc.net](mailto:strickm@rwmc.net).
- **Nebraska Panhandle residents outside Scotts Bluff County:** If you are 50 or older, having symptoms, or concerned about risk factors contact Becky Corman, RN, BSN who works as a Public Health Nurse for the Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) at (308) 262-2217 or [rcorman@pphd.org](mailto:rcorman@pphd.org)
- **Nebraska residents outside of the Panhandle:** Those who are between the ages of 50-74 years and meet income guidelines are eligible to fill out the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Enrollment Form and mail it in. <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Documents/yellow-greenenroll-FINAL.pdf>

### Services Provided by Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program

- Review of health history and education about colon and rectal cancer screening.
- Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) annually if determined to be the best screening test based on your health history.
- Colonoscopy as initial screening test if determined to be the best screening test based on your health history.

- Colonoscopy following a positive Fecal Occult Blood Test

### Every Woman Matters Program

- ***If you are already enrolled*** - You will receive information about the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program with your eligibility notification letter.
- ***If you are not enrolled, but would like information-*** Visit the web page at [http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/womenshealth\\_ewm.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/womenshealth_ewm.aspx) or call at 800-532-2227.

### For residents outside of Nebraska:

- ***How Can I Pay for Screening Tests?*** Many insurance plans and Medicare help pay for colorectal cancer screening. Check with your plan to find out which tests are covered for you. To find out about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).
- ***CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program*** provides access to colorectal cancer screening to low-income men and women who are 50–64 years old and are underinsured or uninsured in 25 states and four tribes. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/crccp/>

You can lower your risk of developing colon cancer by managing the risk factors that you can control, like diet and physical activity. Make your health a priority and make some permanent lifestyle changes. For more information, resources, and recipes check out [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu).

### Sources:

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5. United States Department of Agriculture. Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. [www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm)

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This Newsletter has been peer reviewed.