



## March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

This year, more than 151,000 new cases of the disease are expected. Colorectal cancer is also one of the leading causes of cancer-related death for both men and women.

To help you understand the risks — and the importance of screening — review the full article below to learn more about the things you should know about colorectal cancer.

### Colorectal cancer screening now recommended at age 45

Colorectal cancer is one of the [most common](#) cancers in the U.S. This year, more than [151,000 new cases](#) of the disease are expected. Colorectal cancer is also one of the leading causes of [cancer-related death](#) for both men and women.

“Colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the U.S., but it can often be prevented — in fact, the overall rate of new cases has been dropping by about 1% every year due to testing,” said Dr. Ravi Johar, chief medical officer for UnitedHealthcare. “Still, colon cancer among people under age 50 has been increasing, which is why it is so essential for anyone age 45 and up to get tested.”

To help you understand the risks — and the importance of screening — here are a few things you should know about colorectal cancer.

### Get checked

Simply put, getting screened for colorectal cancer is the best way to prevent its onset. In 2021, the recommended age to begin screening was lowered from 50 to 45, due to an alarming rise in cases of colorectal cancer in those younger than 50.

Screening can help diagnose colorectal cancer at an early stage — when treatment works best.

It’s estimated that nine out of 10 people whose colorectal cancers are found early and treated are still alive five years later.

Screenings are important because they can help detect polyps — abnormal growths that can be removed before they turn into cancer. And you might think a colonoscopy is the only type of screening, but there are other options available.

## What to know before your screening

There is no single “best” colorectal test. The first step is to talk to your doctor about what kind of test might be best for you. It can vary based on your own health and genetics, as well as when you were tested last. Some of the types of testing may include:

- **Stool tests:** A typically annual test to detect blood in the stool, which can sometimes be done at home.
- **Flexible sigmoidoscopy:** This test involves checking for polyps inside the rectum and the lower third of the colon with a thin tube. It’s usually recommended for every five years, or every 10 years, depending on previous screenings.
- **Colonoscopy:** Similar to a sigmoidoscopy, the doctor uses a thin tube but checks the rectum and all of the colon. This may act as a follow-up test if other tests have found anything unusual. Doctors should also be able to remove any polyps detected during the procedure. Generally, a colonoscopy is recommended every 10 years.

## Know the symptoms

Colorectal cancer doesn’t always have symptoms, particularly at the early stages of the disease. This is why it’s so important to get screened appropriately. When symptoms do show, it might include:

- Blood in the stool
- Stomachaches that persist
- Sudden or unexplained weight loss
- Persistent change in your bowel habits

If any of these health issues are present, consider seeing a doctor.

If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, your doctor might recommend getting screened earlier. It’s also worth talking to your doctor about earlier screenings if you have a bowel disease, such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis.

Colorectal cancer is treatable in the early stages of diagnosis but as the cancer progresses, it may be more difficult to cure. Getting tested for colorectal cancer doesn’t have to be scary. The more information you know, the better, so if you have questions about what screening is best for you, talk to your doctor.

Learn more about [colorectal cancer](#).