

In February 2000, President Bill Clinton officially dedicated March as National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Colorectal cancer refers to cancer in the colon and/or rectum, or both. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the US, and the second leading cause of cancer death. It affects men and women of all racial and ethnic groups and is most often found in people 50 years or older. The average lifetime risk for men is 1 in 23, for women 1 in 25.

Most colorectal cancers develop first as polyps, which are abnormal growths inside the colon or rectum that may later become cancerous if they are not removed. Colorectal cancer is very treatable when it is discovered early. Even if it spreads into nearby lymph nodes, surgical treatment followed by chemotherapy is very effective.

Screening tests help your doctor find polyps or cancer before you even have symptoms. This early detection may prevent polyps from becoming cancer and could jumpstart treatment earlier, when it is most effective. It is usually recommended to start getting screened at age 50. Most common screening tests are colonoscopy, Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT or iFBOT), and flexible sigmoidoscopy. It is best to talk with your health care provider to determine which test will be best for you depending on your age and family history.