Surprising News About Colorectal Cancer Risk

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), there’s good news and bad news about colorectal cancer, a type of cancer in which abnormal colon or rectum cells divide uncontrollably, forming a malignant tumor. The good news: cases are down in people older than 50. The bad news: cases are increasing in their younger counterparts. Why? Experts believe it’s in part due to an increase in this age group for one of the primary risk factors: obesity. Have you discussed your colorectal cancer risk with your doctor?

Risk factors for colorectal cancer
Although the major risk factors for colorectal cancer are family history and age (older than 50), other factors have been associated with increased risk, including:
- Excessive alcohol use
- Diet, obesity and being physically inactive
- Cigarette smoking
- History of inflammatory bowel disease

Symptoms of colorectal cancer
The symptoms of colorectal cancer often mirror those of other conditions. If you have any of the following, talk with your doctor:
- A change in bowel habits that lasts more than a few days
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that is not relieved by doing so
- Rectal bleeding or blood in the stool, which may make it look dark
- Cramping or abdominal pain
- Weakness and fatigue
- Unintended weight loss

When detection becomes prevention
Several screenings can help doctors identify colorectal cancer early, when it may be more treatable. In fact, some tests, including a colonoscopy, can actually prevent the development of cancer because the device used to conduct the test can also remove growths. If a screening reveals a growth or other area of concern, you may need additional tests.

The ACS recommends colorectal cancer screenings for those ages 50 and older if the person has an average risk; however, those with an elevated risk may be encouraged to have a screening done before that age.

After an initial screening, your doctor will advise you as to when you need future screenings.

Have you been diagnosed?
If you’ve been diagnosed with colorectal cancer and have access to Horizon Wellness programs, you may be interested in Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey’s Case Management program. Call the number on the back of your member ID to find out more.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute
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