



Clinical Champion Update

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Subject: Lifestyle

Colorectal Cancer Prevention

As a follow-up to VMG's promotion of noninvasive screening for colorectal cancer last month, here are some related details. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer (except for skin cancer) diagnosed in the United States. In 2023, the American Cancer Society estimates 106,970 new cases of colon cancer and 46,050 cases of rectal cancer will be diagnosed; about 52,550 deaths are expected. It's the second most common cause of cancer death in the US. Since the mid-1980s, the incidence rate has been dropping in older adults (about 1% per year 2011-2019), primarily due to more screening as well as to reduction in lifestyle-related risks. However, the rate has been increasing by 1% to 2% per year since the mid-1990s in people younger than 50. Approximately 20% of cases are now diagnosed yearly in people age 55 and younger. Between 1970 and 2020, overall colorectal cancer death rates decreased 57%. However, for people younger than 50, colorectal cancer death rates have increased by 1% per year since 2004. The age for initial screening has decreased from 50 to 45 in the past few years.

The rates of colorectal cancer cases and deaths have been highest in the American Indian/Alaska Native and African American communities compared with all other groups in the US. When compared specifically with the death rate among white men, colorectal cancer death rates were 46% higher in American Indian/Alaska Native men and 44% higher in African American men. These differences are related to systemic socioeconomic and racial disparities that pose greater obstacles to cancer prevention, screening / detection, treatment, and survival. Among these are lower-paying jobs, inadequate health insurance, decreased access to affordable healthy foods, lower-quality education and housing, and unsafe environments.

More than half of all colorectal cancers have been linked to lifestyle factors. Recommendations for prevention include attaining and maintaining a healthy weight (BMI 18.5-24.9), getting regular moderate to vigorous exercise, not smoking, avoiding or limiting alcohol, avoiding or limiting consumption of red and processed meats, not grilling meats at very high temperatures (to avoid exposure to heterocyclic aromatic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, both of which are carcinogens), and consuming a diet focused on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes.

Of the 52,695 participants in the Black Women's Health Study, there was a 33% increased risk of late-onset colorectal cancer for every 100 grams (3.5 ounces) of unprocessed red meat intake per day. Data from the

Health Professionals Follow-Up Study and the Nurses' Health Study showed a 29% higher risk of colorectal cancer in the highest fifth of ultra-processed food consumption. This conclusion remained significant after adjustment for BMI and overall nutritional quality of the diet.

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Clinical champion, lifestyle medicine / hyperlipidemia