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How to reduce the risks of getting colorectal cancer

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Dr Sue Lo Director and senior consultant medical oncologist at The Harley Street Heart & Cancer Centre

Q I am 46 and do not exercise regularly. Most of the time,

I enjoy eating meat. I don't eat much vegetables.

Recently, I experienced some bleeding when I went to the toilet. I found out that it was piles.



My uncle was recently diagnosed with colorectal cancer. It was detected when blood was found in his stools.

Will I get colorectal cancer too? What are my chances of getting it and what can I do to minimise my risk?

A Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers in both women and men.

There are many factors that increase a person's risk of colorectal cancer.

The risk of developing colorectal cancer or dying from it can be reduced through lifestyle modifications and by health screening. For instance, one should adopt a diet high in vegetables and high-fibre foods.



These include a family history of the disease.

Someone with two or more first-degree relatives who have colorectal cancer will be two to three times more likely to have the condition.

First-degree relatives refer to a person's parents, siblings and children. This group of patients with family history usually accounts for 20 per cent of all colorectal cancer cases.

Being older than 50, physically inactive and obese are risk factors too, as is smoking.

A diet high in fat is also believed to increase the risk of colorectal cancer.

In countries with high colorectal cancer rates, fat intake by the population is much higher than in countries with lower cancer rates.

Most colorectal cancers develop from colorectal polyps.

These are small clumps of cells that form on the lining of the colon. Thus, removing benign, but pre-cancerous, colorectal polyps can prevent colorectal cancer.

Inflammatory bowel diseases, primarily chronic ulcerative colitis, are also risk factors.

This is when the lining of the colon becomes inflamed and develops tiny open sores, or ulcers, that produce pus and mucus.

The risks of developing colorectal cancer or dying from it can be reduced through lifestyle modifications and by health screening.

For instance, one should adopt a diet high in vegetables and high-fibre foods, such as wholegrain breads and cereals, to reduce the risk of cancer.

The current dietary recommendations include eating less red meat and taking five portions of fruit and vegetables in one's daily diet.

Physical activity can also help reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer.

You can do more exercise and physical activities every day.

Also, give up smoking and cut down on alcohol intake. If you drink, take moderate amounts.

For people above 50 years old, screening of the colon is highly recommended.

Those who are at high risk, with a strong family history of the disease as well as inflammatory diseases, will need to start screening at a younger age.

Various screening methods are available and these include:

- Faecal occult blood, which checks for blood in the stools.
- Sigmoidoscopy, a procedure in which the doctor looks inside the rectum and the lower part of the colon through a lighted tube.
- Colonoscopy, a test where a flexible tube is used to look at the internal lining of the colon and rectum.
- Virtual computed tomography, an imaging procedure which uses X-rays and computers to produce two- and three- dimensional images of the colon.

Over 90 per cent of colorectal cancer cases are curable with modern treatment when detected early. As you are in your late 40s, have symptoms of blood in the stools and a family history of colorectal cancer, I would advise you to go for a health screening with a colonoscopy to exclude any other underlying problems.