

Colorectal cancer now deadliest cancer under 50 (Broadcast)

INTRO:

COLORECTAL CANCER – ONCE CONSIDERED A DISEASE THAT MOSTLY AFFECTED OLDER ADULTS – IS BEING DIAGNOSED MORE IN YOUNGER PEOPLE.

NOT ONLY IS IT BEING DIAGNOSED MORE – A JAMA STUDY RELEASED IN JANUARY REVEALS COLORECTAL CANCER IS NOW THE LEADING CAUSE OF CANCER-RELATED DEATH IN ADULTS 50 AND YOUNGER.

TAKE VO

THE FINDINGS SUGGEST COLORECTAL CANCER IS THE ONLY MAJOR CANCER THAT HAS INCREASED IN THE LAST TWO DECADES... AVERAGING MORE THAN A 1-PERCENT INCREASE EVERY YEAR SINCE 2005.

DR. JASON BILL... AN INTERVENTIONAL GASTROENTEROLOGIST WITH OSF HEALTHCARE... SAYS NOT ONLY ARE YOUNGER PATIENTS BEING DIAGNOSED – THEY'RE AT LATER STAGES OF THE DISEASE. HE ADDS THAT RESEARCHERS ARE LOOKING INTO THE CAUSE AS WE SPEAK.

THE CURRENT SCREENING GUIDELINES RECOMMEND THOSE 45 AND OLDER GET A COLONOSCOPY EVERY 10 YEARS.

TAKE SOT | DR. JASON BILL | INTERVENTIONAL GASTROENTEROLOGIST | OSF HEALTHCARE

"There seems to be a birth cohort effect, meaning those born after a certain time, seem to have an increasing incident of colon cancer diagnosis," Dr. Bill says. "So, what that leads people to believe, is that there must be an environmental trigger to the increased incidence. The most likely culprits include ultra-processed foods and the obesity epidemic. Further research is going into other exposures including microplastics."

VO TAG

GENETICS CAN PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN COLORECTAL CANCER RISK. DOCTORS MAY RECOMMEND GENETIC COUNSELING AND TESTING FOR THOSE WITH A STRONG PERSONAL OR FAMILY HISTORY WITH COLORECTAL CANCER... OR RELATED CANCERS. ALONG WITH REGULAR EXERCISE... EATING A HEALTHY DIET... AND AVOIDING BOTH SMOKING AND ALCOHOL – DR. BILL SAYS GETTING SCREENED IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO. THE COLONOSCOPY IS STILL THE GOLD STANDARD.

ADDITIONAL INFO/SOUNDBITES

Screening guidelines may miss at-risk younger adults

Colorectal cancer [screening guidelines](#) have evolved in recent years. The American Cancer Society recommends routine screening beginning at age 45 for people at average risk.

While research is ongoing, Dr. Bill notes that current guidelines may not fully address this younger population; however, the decrease in the screening from 50 to 45 was an important step.

Colonoscopies don't just detect cancer – they prevent it

"It's a test where we're able to examine the colon and prevent cancer," Dr. Bill says. "In those patients who have decided to not get a colonoscopy, any screening is better than nothing. That's where the mailed stool kits come in handy."

During a colonoscopy, physicians can identify and remove polyps (abnormal growths) that can develop into cancer if left untreated. These samples can then be analyzed to determine cancer risk.

"In general, we can tell you right then and there what your findings are," Dr. Bill points out.

This immediate feedback provides patients with clarity and allows care teams to quickly determine next steps if needed.

Symptoms and risk factors shouldn't be ignored

Even for adults under age 45, certain symptoms and medical histories may warrant earlier screening. These include:

- Rectal bleeding
- Anemia (low red blood cells)
- A strong family history of colorectal cancer
- Family history of polyposis syndromes
- Personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, including ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Sudden abdominal pain
- Unexplained weight loss

If you're concerned you're at-risk for [colorectal cancer](#) or are experiencing any of the symptoms above, it's time to speak with your primary care provider and request further screening.

Lifestyle changes can help lower risk

While some risk factors, such as genetics, cannot be controlled, healthy lifestyle choices can help reduce colorectal cancer risk. Experts recommend:

- Avoiding tobacco use
- Limiting or avoiding alcohol
- [Reducing consumption of ultra-processed and processed foods](#)
- Exercising regularly
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Avoiding prolonged sedentary behavior
- [Eating a fiber-rich, balanced diet](#)

These steps support overall digestive health and may reduce cancer risk over time.

Screening saves lives

Colorectal cancer is highly treatable when detected early – and often preventable through routine screening.

Adults age 45 and older should [schedule](#) regular [colorectal cancer screening](#), including colonoscopy.