

Panel Of Experts



CINDY HEROUX, RD
Speaker, Author of *The Manual That Should Have Come With Your Body*
President, Speaking of Wellness LC



BRANDON HAYES-LATTIN, MD
Senior Medical Advisor
Lance Armstrong Foundation



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Institute
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MELINA JAMPOLIS, MD
Internist and Board Certified Physi-
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UPMC Cancer Centers and University
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Q: Can the foods we eat increase or decrease our risk for colorectal cancer?

A: "Absolutely!" says registered dietitian Cindy Heroux. "A diet high in red and processed meats can increase your risk of colon cancer, but a plant-based diet that's high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains can protect you against cancer."

To get the most cancer protection, Cindy recommends eating foods as close to the way nature made them as possible. "The more processed a food is the more likely it is to have less of what your body needs, and more of what it doesn't. Also, while individual nutrients are important, they rarely work alone. Often times it's the combination of nutrients in a given food that make it so powerful. For example, an apple eaten with the peel on has far more cancer fighting ability than one with the peel removed."

A whole foods, plant-based diet helps protect you against cancer in several ways. "More fiber helps keep everything moving, and the antioxidants and phytochemicals found in brightly colored fruits and vegetables offer special protection against cancer," explains Cindy. "Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are packed with nutrition, but naturally low in calories which also makes it easier to maintain a healthy weight, an important risk factor for colorectal cancer."

Q: Lance Armstrong and the Livestrong Foundation have provided knowledge, inspiration and encouragement to so many people. What role does personal empowerment play in the prevention and treatment of colorectal cancer?

A: "The Lance Armstrong Foundation believes that knowledge is power," says Dr. Hayes-Lattin. "In colorectal cancer (CRC), this includes knowledge about preventing cancer, detecting a diagnosis early, understanding a diagnosis, finding the best therapy, and planning for the future. In order to apply that knowledge, it is key for patients to have access to their medical data such as biologic risk factors, pathology and staging information, or treatment summaries."

Empowerment enables patients to be active participants in their own care—to be proactive rather than reactive.

"Next generation electronic tools may better empower patients to share knowledge as they tell their story," says Dr. Hayes-Lattin. "Some elements of a patient's cancer story include describing the psychosocial impact and sharing helpful resources including details about genetic and biologic markers, treatment responses, and patient reported outcomes, all of which may better inform cancer research. The Lance Armstrong Foundation is committed to building tools which enable patient empowerment."

Q: Why is early detection of colorectal cancer so important and what type of screening is best?

A: "When detected at an early stage, colorectal cancer is curable," says Dr. Krasna. "If you are not screened properly and the cancer progresses, it's less likely to be cured." In fact, when detected early, colorectal cancer may be curable in over 90 percent of cases.

Who should be screened, and when, depends on your personal and family history.

"There have been recent changes in the recommendations," explains Dr. Krasna, "not for those at high risk, but for the general population. Everyone over 50 who is at average risk should have a colonoscopy every 10 years. Other options such as a flexible sigmoidoscopy or CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy) are recommended every five years. A fecal occult blood test (gFOBT), fecal immunochemical test (FIT) and rectal exam can be done yearly. If you are predisposed to cancer because of a family history of colorectal cancer or polyps, or a personal history of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease, you need to be screened earlier."

Q: Why is colon health so important and what can we do to help maintain a healthy colon?

A: "The colon is important for nutritional health, but it is also an important region of immune function, both locally and for the entire body," says Dr. Jampolis. "It is one of the body's first lines of defense against toxins you take in through food, and having sufficient healthy bacteria in the colon can help boost overall immune cellular function in addition to protecting your colon."

To minimize exposure to toxins, improve regularity, and keep the colon healthy, Dr. Jampolis recommends consuming a diet high in naturally occurring fiber such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, as well as foods containing probiotics (healthy bacteria) such as yogurt. "Naturally occurring fiber is important," explains Dr. Jampolis. "Research has shown that adding whole grains to your diet has a protective affect against colon cancer. That's not necessarily the case with simply adding fiber to other foods, especially less healthy ones."

Dr. Jampolis adds, "Fiber not only speeds transit time and increases stool bulk which can help control constipation, but it also provides food to support the growth of healthy bacteria which can alter the pH of the colon, providing added protection and improving mineral absorption."

Q: Prevention or early detection of colorectal cancer is ideal, but are there options for people who have advanced disease that has spread to other parts of the body?

A: "There are numerous options for these patients such as chemotherapy combinations that have been shown to be effective, as well as surgical and chemotherapy combinations," says Dr. Bartlett. "At UPMC Cancer Centers, we have developed a Colon Cancer Specialty Care Center where the medical oncologist, the surgeon and the radiation oncologist work together to come up with individualized treatment plans for each patient."

Those treatment plans often involve novel approaches such as delivering chemotherapy during surgery. Dr. Bartlett explains, "We can surgically isolate a region of the body such as the abdominal cavity, or an organ such as the liver. By delivering the chemotherapy drugs directly to that region or organ, we can minimize side effects to the rest of the body and deliver a much higher concentration of chemotherapy drugs to the tumor."

Participation in clinical trials may be an option. "In addition to the medical specialists, we have our team of clinical research experts," says Dr. Bartlett. "This offers patients involvement in clinical trials, some of which are unique to the Colon Cancer Specialty Care Center at UPMC Cancer Centers." For patients with metastatic colon cancer, these innovative therapies offer more than just options, they offer hope.