

Senior Sense



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Your Health

Colorectal Cancer Facts

If you are over age 50, you are more likely to get colorectal cancer. What is colorectal cancer? It is cancer of the large intestine and the rectum. It develops from small polyps that look like small heads of cauliflower on stalks that grow in the intestine and rectum.

Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in both men and women. Often people do not get diagnosed until their disease is serious. That is why regular screening is important. African Americans and relatives of those who have had colorectal cancer especially need to be screened since they are at much higher risk.

Colorectal cancer can be prevented and it is very treatable and curable if it is found early. In the early stages, however, you may not have symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they can vary. Common symptoms are:

- Change in your bowel habits lasting more than two weeks including diarrhea, constipation or a narrowed stool;
- Bright red or tarry black blood in your stool;
- Frequent cramps, gas or abdominal pain;
- Abdominal pain when you have a bowel movement;
- Feeling like you need to have a bowel movement even when you don't;
- Being weak or tired;
- Low iron in your blood (anemia);
- Weight loss for no known reason.

You may reduce your risk for colorectal cancer by:

- Eating a higher fiber diet that is lower in fat and calories;
- Controlling your weight;
- Being physically active every day;
- Preventing or controlling diabetes;
- Not smoking;
- Limiting alcohol intake;

- Taking aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs after talking with your doctor.

There are several ways to screen for colorectal cancer. The most effective is a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy uses a long flexible tube attached to a video camera to view the entire colon. During the exam, the doctor can remove any small polyps that are found. Even if you use other screening methods, you will need a colonoscopy to confirm the diagnosis and remove the polyps. Most people only need this test once every ten years.

Another way to screen is a fecal occult blood test that looks for blood in the stool. This method is inexpensive. You collect small samples of your stool on three different days and smear them onto a special card which is sent to a lab. This test may not find all cancers since some do not bleed. The result can be affected by what you eat or if you have hemorrhoids; however, it is better than nothing. This test is usually done yearly.

Another method is a flexible sigmoidoscopy (sig-moid-os-sko-pe). This uses a slender tube with a light to examine the last third of your large intestine. Most polyps and cancers occur in this section, but cancer in the other two-thirds of the intestine would be missed. You will probably need this test once every five years.

A barium enema can also be used to allow the doctor to look at your colon with an X-ray. This is often done with the sigmoidoscopy to find cancers or polyps in the other 2/3 of your colon.

You may have also heard about a

“virtual” colonoscopy. This uses a CT scan to take pictures of your colon. This is a new method and is not found everywhere. Again you would need a regular colonoscopy to remove any polyps.

All these methods, except the fecal occult blood test, require you to clean the bowel out ahead of time with a special cleansing fluid that you drink and an enema. Some of the drinks require less fluid and time to work than others so discuss this with your doctor. You will also need a clear liquid diet the day before.

Colorectal cancer does not appear overnight. That is why regular screening is so important. While the tests may be costly if your health insurance does not cover them, they are less expensive than cancer treatment. No one says screening is pleasant, but it can save your life.

Deliciously Light Sweet Potato Casserole

4 cups sweet potatoes (about 4 medium fresh)

Non-stick vegetable spray

¼ cup orange juice

½ cup granulated artificial sweetener

¼ cup dry roasted chopped almonds

¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1. Boil the sweet potatoes covered in water in a Dutch oven for 30 minutes or until tender. Drain and cool enough to handle. Peel.
2. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray 1 quart casserole dish with non-stick spray.

3. In large mixing bowl, mash sweet potatoes. Stir in remaining ingredients until well mixed.
4. Spoon into casserole dish and bake uncovered for 25 minutes.

5 servings ½ cup each

Calories:	158
Carbohydrate:	35 grams
Fat:	2.5 grams
Protein:	3 grams
Sodium:	8 milligrams
Dietary Fiber:	5 grams
Cholesterol:	0 milligrams

Your Resources

What Seniors Should Know: Energy Bills & Conservation

With the increased prices in petroleum, consumer goods, prescription drugs, and others, sometimes money management can get overwhelming. Have you ever wondered how you can reduce your energy bill and still stay comfortable? Sometimes it's just asking what your options are, and other times it is updating and maintaining certain energy-hungry areas of your home.

Your natural gas or electric marketer (the company that sells you natural gas and/or electricity) is responsible to serve you as a customer. One of the easiest ways to reduce your energy bill is to ask your marketer questions about the different rate plans. Most marketers have senior rate plans for *all* seniors, no matter what

income bracket. These plans tend to have lower rates and lower service charges. Also, if you are on a fixed income, a budget billing option might work for you. This option is an averaged bill of your usage throughout the year so you don't have payments that are drastically different depending on the season.

If you are in a low-income bracket, there are many programs for you that will discount your bill. More than likely, there is a local government or community action agency that can provide you with energy bill assistance. The programs have many different requirements to qualify, such as certain age, income level, household size, total monthly income, etc. so be sure to research these agencies in your area. A good start would be to call 1-800-ASKUGA1 to contact Cooperative Extension.

Here are some easy ways for seniors to use energy efficiently, conservatively, and responsibly.

Manage your home's exposure to the sun:

- During the winter, keep window shades, blinds and curtains open during the day to let in sunlight, and close them in the evening to retain heat.
- During the summer, use shades, blinds, or curtains on windows during the day to keep the sun's rays from heating your home.

Adjust the thermostat:

- For the summer, set thermostat to around 78°F if comfortable or use fans to keep you comfortable.
- For the winter, set the thermostat to around 68°F while you are home and three degrees lower when you are out.

Change your light bulbs:

- Replace five incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs).
- These bulbs will last for up to five years and can save a lot of energy in your home

Replace or clean filters at least every three months.

- Dirty filters can result in reduced air flow, which reduces comfort levels and overworks the air conditioning system.
- Use 1-inch pleated panel filters or MERV rating of 8 to 11
- Try to buy a package with multiple filters and not one filter at a time—this will encourage you to change them and you won't have to go to the store as often.

Check the fireplace damper or flue

- When you are not using the fireplace, the damper should always be closed; it allows heat or conditioned air from your home to escape
- If your fireplace does not have a damper, cover the fireplace opening with a snug-fitting cover when it is not in use.

Lower your water heater temperature

- Try to lower your water heater temperature to around 120°F.
- If you do not have a dishwasher (or one with a booster heater), lower your water heater temperature to around 140°F.

Prepared by Jason Jones and Jorge Atilas

Your Relationships

Hearing and Listening

Helen Keller once described the difference between blindness and deafness. She said that blindness separates man from things, but deafness separates man from man. Losing the ability to hear clearly is one of several losses that many seniors must learn to cope with. Approximately one in three seniors over age 60 have significant hearing loss.

Thankfully, hearing aids and changes in how you speak to seniors can minimize many of the effects of hearing loss. There is another form of impaired hearing, however, that afflicts caregivers more than it does seniors – the problem of hearing what a senior says, but not really listening for the meaning and emotion behind the words. All of us can fine-tune our listening skills. Better listening leads to better understanding, and a shared understanding is the foundation for quality caregiving.

Doesn't good listening just come naturally? Not always. It usually requires specific effort and focus on the part of the listener. Three kinds of barriers can get in the way of good listening. They include:

- Personal needs. Many seniors tend to repeat themselves. Many caregivers tend to feel stressed with competing demands on their time. As a result, some caregivers learn to “tune out” many comments from their senior. Caregivers' personal needs, from getting to the grocery store to paying

bills, can be overwhelming. It is hard to give your full attention to your senior when your own needs are pressing.

- Emotions and moods. Many caregivers struggle with their own emotions regarding their situation. Emotions such as anger, frustration and sadness can all get in the way of your ability to focus.
- Attitudes. We all have preconceived ideas about people that can interfere with our interaction with them. Many of these biases are subconscious, but they can still interfere with the mutual respect that leads to quality listening and understanding. Be honest: you have attitudes about grooming, appearance, age, gender and personal responsibility that color your interactions with others. These attitudes can affect your caregiver listening skills too.

Just as exercising can make you more physically fit, there are some habits that you can practice to build your listening skills. Are you one of those people who seem to attract others who unload all their thoughts and feelings? If so, you're probably already seen as a good listener. Here are some of the kinds of behaviors that good listeners share:

- Pay attention when your senior is speaking. Sit down and give your senior your full attention. You can water the flowers and do the laundry later.
- Encourage your senior to talk. We all pick up on those subtle signals that someone is not really listening to us –

eyes wandering, sentences interrupted, changing the subject, etc. Are you somehow discouraging your senior from sharing his thoughts and feelings by sending these signals?

- Confirm what the senior has said. This helps to ensure that your understanding is consistent with what the senior meant. Two ways to confirm understanding are to use open-ended questions, such as, "Tell me more about what you remember from her visit," and paraphrasing comments to double-check your understanding, such as, "So what you're saying is..."
- Fit your tone and mood to that of the senior. Is this a "good day" when your senior is feeling upbeat and positive? Try to be "in sync" with his mood with your own. You don't always need to match his mood, but try to be in tune with it so you are connecting in your communication.

Simply hearing someone's words, and really listening for the meaning behind them, are different skills. Your relationship with your senior will affect your willingness to take the extra effort required for quality listening. If you resent your caregiving responsibilities and disrespect your senior, you're not likely to want to make that effort. On the other hand, consciously improving your listening skills may help rebuild the respect and affection you once shared with your senior.

Adapted from "The Caregiver Helpbook," Legacy Caregiver Services, 2006.



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Dear Friend:

SENIOR SENSE is a quarterly publication provided by your local county Cooperative Extension office. It is prepared by Extension Family & Consumer Sciences specialists at The University of Georgia specifically for the educational needs of older Georgians.

Please contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on these and related topics.

Learning *for* **Life**

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