

Colon cancer: Are you at risk?

One in four people has a family history of colon cancer. Knowing your family health history can help your doctor determine your risk for colon cancer.

To assess your risk, research your family history. Indicate how each person with colon cancer is related to you, as well as how old he or she was when the disease was diagnosed. Also note if they had other kinds of cancer, like breast cancer or ovarian cancer.

Then share this information with your doctor, who may recommend more frequent screening. Your doctor also may decide to refer you to a genetic counselor. The genetic counselor will discuss your risk for colon cancer after reviewing your family history. If your family history has “red flags,” the genetic counselor may suggest genetic testing, which can determine if you carry a gene that increases your chance of getting colon cancer.

Genetic testing is not right for everyone. Only a small number of families have a change in a gene that increases their chance of getting colon cancer. People who are offered genetic testing as a rule have:

- Three or more closely related family members diagnosed with colon cancer.
- Affected family members in two or more generations.
- At least one person with colon cancer diagnosed before the age of 50.

Your physician also should provide information about things you can do to lower your risk of developing colon cancer, including eating low-fat foods, exercising, not smoking and reducing alcohol use.

The Moses Cone Health System Regional Cancer Center will sponsor a lecture on colon cancer on March 5. For more information or to register to attend, call **832-8000**. For more information about colon cancer, go to ***www.cancer.gov***.

