

GeneScene

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The official newsletter of the Guilford Genomic Medicine Initiative (GGMI)

Does Colon Cancer Run In Your Family?

Did you know...

- Every 4 minutes, a person in the U.S. is diagnosed with colon or rectal cancer.
- Every 9 minutes, someone dies from the disease.
- Famous people who developed colon cancer include:
Walter Matthau
Milton Berle
Jackie Gleason
Audrey Hepburn
Darryl Strawberry
Charles M. Schulz



Colon cancer is preventable yet it is the nation's second leading cause of cancer death.

The American Cancer Society

estimates that 148,610 men and women developed cancer of the colon and rectum in 2006. Of these individuals, 37% will die from the disease.

Approximately, 30 percent of people with colon cancer have a family history of the disease. This type of cancer is called **familial colon cancer**. If you have a relative who developed colon cancer before the age of 60 you should tell your doctor. Your risk of developing colon cancer may be increased.

Most doctors think that genetic and environmental factors play a role in the development of colon cancer. However, not much is known about the *specific* genes involved in familial colon cancer. Therefore, genetic testing is not available for these families.

About 5 percent of individuals who develop colon cancer have a genetic change that is often passed from generation to generation. This type of cancer is called **hereditary colon cancer**. In these families, the chance of developing colon cancer is much higher than in the average person.

For example, people with the most common hereditary form of colon cancer have a 70 percent chance of developing the disease. They are also more likely to develop other cancers. Genetic testing is available to people who have a family history of hereditary colon cancer.

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**Family: A social unit where the father is concerned with parking space,
the children with outer space, and the mother with closet space.**

~Evan Esar



**Guilford
Genomic Medicine
Initiative**

www.genomic-medicine.org

Does Colon Cancer Run In Your Family? (cont.)

Genetic specialists may use a checklist to find out if a person has a family history of hereditary colon cancer. These people may benefit from genetic testing. The specialist is looking to see if a person has:

- ✓ colon cancer in multiple close relatives on the same side of the family (in the same lineage)
- ✓ colon cancer occurring in each generation in the same lineage
- ✓ family members who got colon cancer before age 50
- ✓ family members who got colon cancer more than once
- ✓ women in the family who have had colon cancer and uterine cancer
- ✓ many gastrointestinal growths called polyps

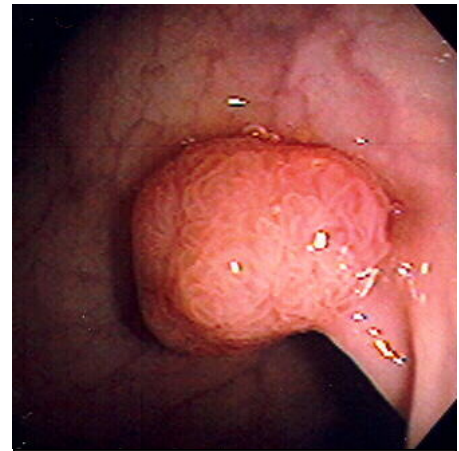
Colon cancer is both preventable and curable.

Colon cancer is prevented by removing colon polyps before they become cancerous. According to the National Polyp Study, removing these polyps reduces the chance to get colon cancer by 90 percent.

Since you cannot “feel” colon polyps inside you, your doctor will need to do certain tests to look for polyps.

If you don’t have a family history of colon cancer, your doctor may recommend that you begin colon cancer screening at age 50. There are a number of screening tests to choose from. Check with your doctor to find out which test is right for you.

If you have a family history of familial or hereditary colon cancer your doctor may recommend that you begin screening at an earlier age. In these cases doctors usually recommend colonoscopies. With this test they can look at the entire colon and rectum and remove polyps before they become cancerous.



Colon polyp



On the Web...

Guilford Genomic Medicine Initiative
www.genomic-medicine.org

National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov

Colon Cancer Alliance
www.ccalliance.org