

Screening And Early Detection Saves Lives

SOCIAL AWARENESS Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer and second most deadly cancer in Canada.

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Colon cancer is deadly but highly preventable if caught early.

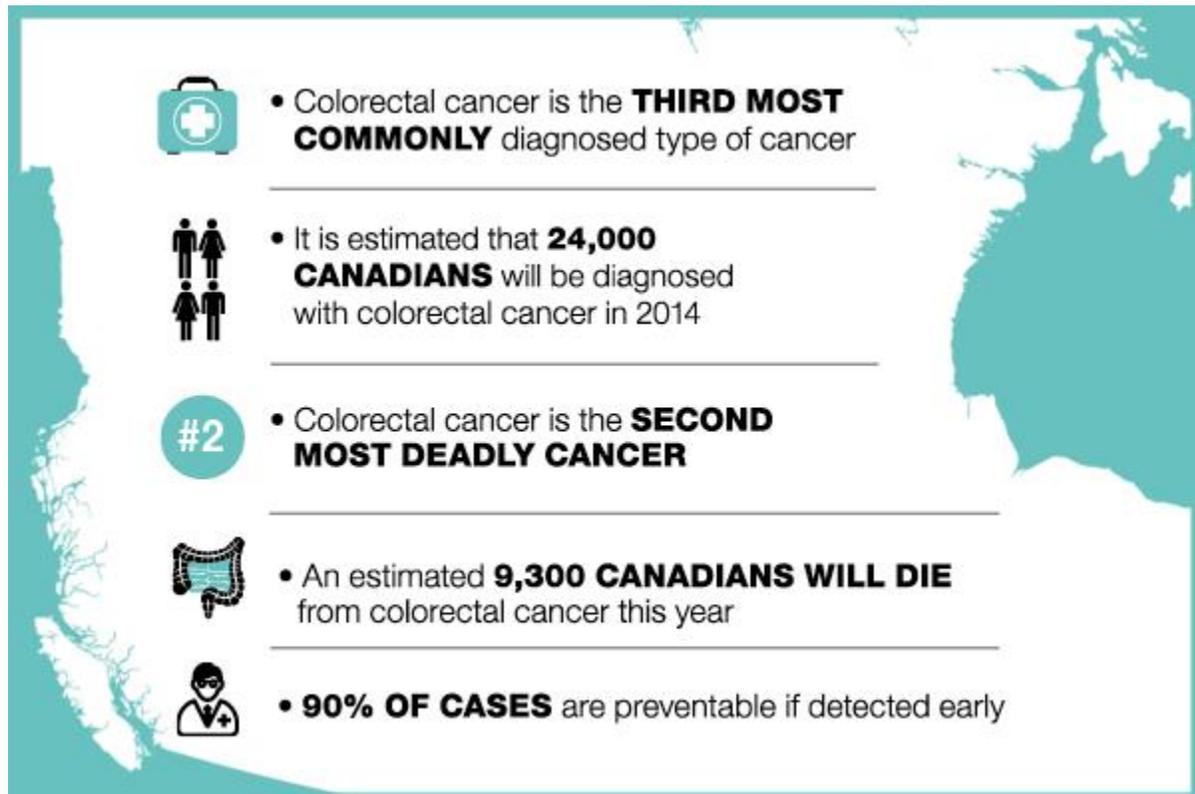
If caught early, colorectal cancer is highly treatable and is up to 90 percent preventable through timely and thorough testing and screening.

“More than 9,000 Canadians a year die from colorectal cancer, so it’s a big problem,” says Dr. Malcolm Moore, Head of Medical Oncology and Hematology at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto. “The good news is that the death rate is falling by about two percent a year, so hopefully by 2020 colon cancer will no longer be the second leading cause of cancer deaths.”

It is important to speak with your family physician to find out more about getting tested or screened. For many Canadians, the test could be as simple as an at-home stool sample test. For those with a family history of colon cancer, or who are over 50, it may be more appropriate to undergo a colonoscopy for screening.

“It’s not exactly popular conversation to talk about the colon, but I do think it’s changing,” says colorectal surgeon Dr. Zane Cohen, the Director of the Zane Cohen Centre for Digestive Diseases at Toronto’s Mount Sinai Hospital. “There’s been a heavy push on awareness, and I

think it's much less of a stigma now to talk about colorectal cancer, bowel movements and stool patterns."



Colorectal cancer in Canada

Source: Colorectal Cancer in Canada

Higher-risk groups

Although no one cause leads to colorectal cancer, some people are at higher risk for developing the disease. If you fall into any one of the following groups, talk to your doctor about being screened as soon as possible:

- You have a family history of colon cancer. (If you have a first-degree relative; parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent, with a history of colon cancer, aim to get tested 10 years before their age of diagnosis)
- You have been diagnosed with polyps or early stage colon cancer
- You have inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)
- You have a family history of inherited breast cancer, uterine or ovarian cancer
- You are age 50+

"There is no doubt that population-based screening and early detection have cut the death rate," says Moore. "Everybody is at the same sort of risk for getting colon cancer, so we all need to be aware of it and we all need to be appropriately screened. If there's one message, it is that once you reach 50, you need to be screened."

Warning signs

Here are the signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer to look out for:

- Rectal bleeding or bright red or very dark blood in your stool
- A persistent change in normal bowel habits such as diarrhea, constipation or both
- Frequent or constant cramps that last for more than a few days
- Stools that are ribbon-like or narrower than usual
- General stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness and/or cramps)
- Frequent gas pains
- A strong need to move your bowels, but with little stool
- A feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Unexplained weight loss
- Constant fatigue

It is important to note that symptoms often do not occur until the later stages of colorectal disease.

Talk openly with your doctor, know the signs and symptoms of colon cancer and your risk category. When it makes sense to go for screening, do so – there is no health advantage to inaction.

KATHERINE O'BRIEN, editorial@mediaplanet.com