If you’re 45 years or older, it’s time to get screened for colorectal cancer.

But what is colorectal cancer, how do you test for it, and what can you do to help lower your risk?

Where is your colon and what does it do?

The colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus.

The colon removes water and some nutrients and electrolytes from partially digested food. Then the rest of the food travels down and out of your body through the rectum and anus.

Sometimes abnormal growths, called polyps, form in the colon or rectum. Over time, some polyps may turn into cancer.

What are the risk factors for colorectal cancer?

Your risk of getting colorectal cancer increases with age. Other risk factors include having:

- Inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis.
- A personal or family history of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps.
- Certain genetic conditions
- Lack of regular physical activity.
- A diet low in fruit and vegetables.
- A low-fiber and high-fat diet, or a diet high in processed meats.
- Overweight and obesity.
- Alcohol consumption.
- Tobacco use.

What can you do to reduce your risk?

Get screened for colorectal cancer routinely, beginning at age 45.

**Diet**

Maintain a diet low in animal fats and high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

**Healthy Choices**

Exercise, lose weight, limit alcohol consumption, and avoid tobacco.

What should you know about colorectal cancer screening?

A screening test is used to look for a disease when a person doesn’t have symptoms. Screening tests can find polyps, so that they can be removed before they turn into cancer.

Studies show that some screening tests for colorectal cancer help find cancer at an early stage and may decrease the number of deaths from the disease.

Regular screening is the key to preventing colorectal cancer and finding it early. Ask your health center doctor for more information.

**To find a health center, visit [www.chc-ar.org/health-center-list](http://www.chc-ar.org/health-center-list).**

**Sources:**

- [www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/)

This publication is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling $1,203,478 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov. MARCH 2023