



Wake Forest University School of Medicine  
**Women's Health Center of Excellence for Research,  
Leadership, Education**

Fact Sheet

**Colorectal Cancer:  
Are you at risk?**

Cancer of the colon and rectum combined (colorectal cancer) is the third most common form of cancer in both men and women. It is also the third leading cause of cancer death in men and women.

***Who is at risk?***

Everyone is at risk for colorectal cancer.

***The strongest risk factors are:***

**Older age:** Three quarters of all new colorectal cancers are found in persons over age 65.

**Race:** African-Americans have the highest rates of colorectal cancer.

**Family History:** Persons who have a family history of colon cancer or certain kinds of intestinal polyps are at a higher risk.

**Personal History:** Persons who have had colorectal cancer, intestinal polyps or inflammatory bowel disease are at a higher risk.

***Things that may protect against colorectal cancer:***

- ▶ A diet high in fruit and vegetables, and low in fat
- ▶ Not smoking
- ▶ Hormone therapy for women
- ▶ Aspirin use
- ▶ Regular exercise

***All men and women over age 50 should be checked for colorectal cancer regularly. Persons at high risk should begin regular checks at age 40.***

***This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.***

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*For more information about women's health issues, stop by our Resource Center at 2000 West First Street, Piedmont Plaza II, 1st Floor, Winston Salem, NC 27104, visit our website at [wfubmc.edu/whcoe](http://wfubmc.edu/whcoe) or contact us at (336) 713-4220.*

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