

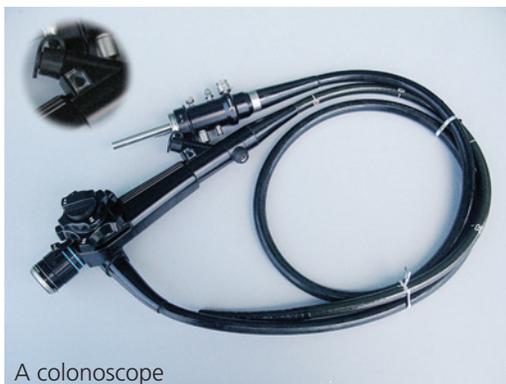


# Preventing Colon Cancer

By Dr Quah Hak Mien

**C**olon and rectal cancer, or colorectal cancer, is the top cancer in Singapore. The number is increasing and has become the commonest cancer in recent years. The lifetime probability of an individual developing colorectal cancer is approximately 1 in 20, and is among the highest in the world. A big proportion of patients are still diagnosed at the advanced stage of the disease. This is a tragedy because most cases are curable if they are diagnosed early. The cure rate for localised colon cancer can be as high as 90%. However, prevention is still the best. Screening is important because colorectal cancer is a preventable cancer.

Most cancers of the colon are believed to develop from polyps. Colonoscopy detection and a subsequent removal of polyps will result in reduced colorectal cancer risk. A polyp removed is a potential cancer prevented.



A colonoscope

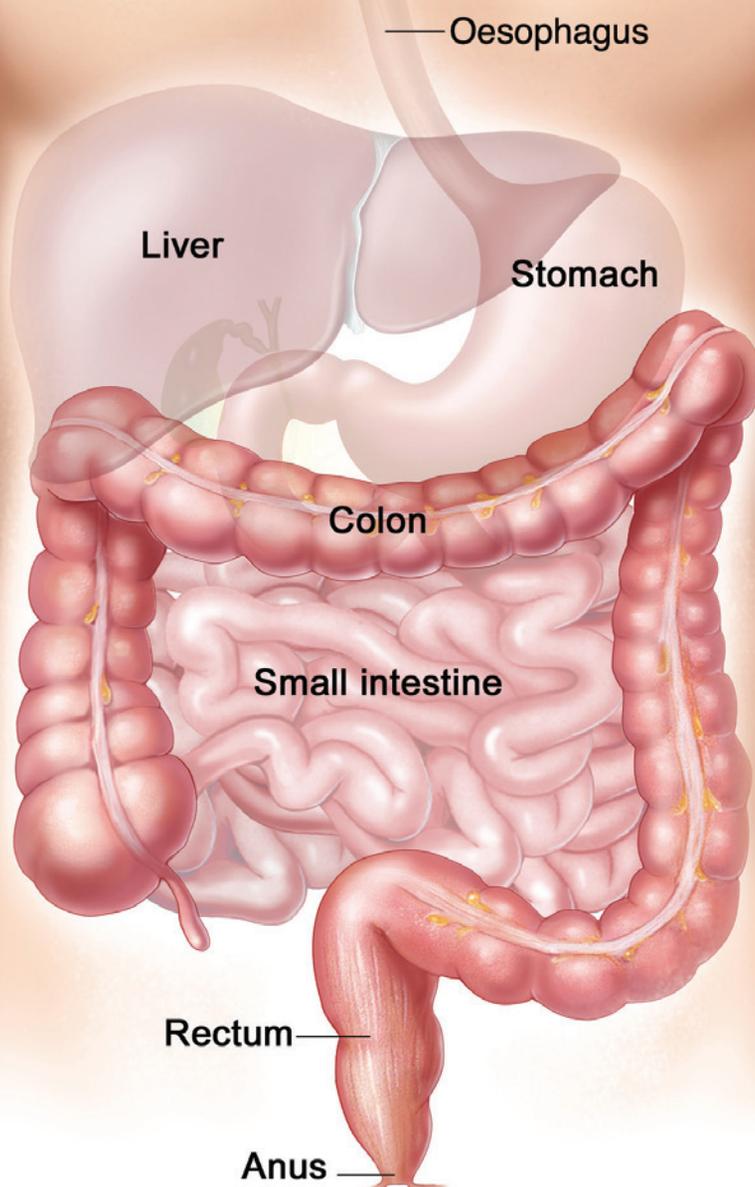
## Reduce your risks of colon cancer

Two possible strategies may be adopted. First, work on reducing your risk factors. Healthy eating is good for your overall well-being. A healthy diet leads to good digestive health and reduces the risk of diseases like heart attack, diabetes and stroke. Maintain a healthy balanced diet that includes sufficient amounts of fruits, vegetables and whole grain, which contain fibre and antioxidants. It is recommended to have five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Each serving is half a cup.

Cut down on fat intake, especially from animal sources. Reduce the intake of red meat, especially those cooked at high temperatures or barbecued. Avoid overeating as obesity may increase your risk of cancer and cause a whole host of other health problems.

Cut down on alcohol, and drink only in moderation. Cigarette smoking has been confirmed as contributing to colon and rectal cancer. This is in addition to smoking accounting for more than 90% of lung cancer. The risk begins to drop as soon as a smoker quits. So it's time to stop smoking!

Exercise regularly at least two to three times every week for 30 minutes to one hour each time. Exercises may include jogging, brisk walking, swimming or cycling. The intensity of the exercise should leave one mildly breathless.



### Participate in colon cancer screening

This second strategy is most important. Screening for colon cancer has been proven to save lives. In the United States and Northern European countries, the number of colorectal cancer deaths has been falling, and this has been attributed to screening, early detection and prevention by removal of polyps. It is advisable to go for a colon screening from the age of 50 to check for colorectal polyps or cancer, even if you have no symptoms. There are two screening tests available, the stool test and the colonoscopy.

#### Stool Test

The stool test is the easiest way to screen for colorectal cancer. A stool test checks for minute amounts of blood in the stools. This small amount of blood in the stool is usually not visible to the naked eye. If the stool test is positive for blood, colonoscopy is recommended. Even if the stool test result is normal, it should be repeated every year.

#### Colonoscopy

The colonoscopy is a specialised test where a flexible telescope tube is inserted through the anus to inspect the inside of the colon and rectum directly. Biopsies and polyp removal are possible through the colonoscope. This procedure, however, requires bowel preparation. The colonoscopy is considered the most accurate method to examine the colon and rectum.



**Dr Quah Hak Mien** is a specialist surgeon at Gleneagles Medical Centre. His clinical interest is in the treatment of colorectal diseases. His scope of work includes managing a wide range of conditions including colorectal cancer, diverticular disease, inflammatory bowel disease, perianal diseases like piles, anal fistula, and anal fissure. He also has clinical expertise in functional bowel disorders like irritable bowel syndrome, constipation and faecal incontinence.



#### Quah Hak Mien Colorectal Centre

6 Napier Road #05-01, Gleneagles Medical Centre, Singapore 258499

Tel: (65) 6479 7189

Email: [enquiry@colorectalcentre.com.sg](mailto:enquiry@colorectalcentre.com.sg)

Website: [www.colorectalcentre.com.sg](http://www.colorectalcentre.com.sg)

