

Cystic Fibrosis and Colorectal Cancer

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month!

People living with CF (PwCF) may be more at risk for developing certain cancers because of the increased inflammation, oxidative stress, and impaired immune response caused by the dysfunctional CFTR protein. Other types of cancers have been associated with CF, but the most common are gastrointestinal cancers, specifically colorectal cancer.

Here's what you need to know about the risks and what you can do to be prepared.

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer begins as small polyps in the lining of the colon or in the rectum, which if caught early, can be treated before they become malignant cancer.

If left untreated, cancerous polyps can grow and develop into cancer, which can embed itself into the intestinal wall and spread throughout tissues in the body.

Why do I need to know about colorectal cancer?

People with CF are 5 to 10 times more likely to develop colorectal cancer (CRC) than people without CF.

People who have had a solid organ transplant are at an even higher risk of developing colon cancer— 25 times more.

Carriers of CF are also at a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer.

What can I do?

Listen to your body. Symptoms of CRC can mimic CF GI symptoms such as abnormal bowel movements, blood in your stool, or abdominal pain.

It's recommended that people living with CF get screened for CRC at age 40.

BEF advocates for patients to have productive conversations with their doctor about when to get screened for CRC, which may be earlier than the recommended age.

What is the screening process?

A colonoscopy is a procedure that screens for colon cancer that uses a long tube with a camera on the end to see inside your colon and rectum.

CFF has a guide for how to prepare for a colonoscopy for pwCF.

At-home tests are not recommended for people at high risk of colorectal cancer, like PwCF.

Talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

For more information, visit these resources:

Fight Colorectal Cancer— resources for people living with CRC
CDC: Colorectal Cancer
WHO: Colorectal Cancer
American Cancer Society: Key Statistics for Colorectal Cancer

DISCLAIMER: The Boomer Esiason Foundation provides information and guidance to adults living with cystic fibrosis for educational purposes only. The advice offered, including recommendations such as colorectal cancer screening, is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Please consult your healthcare provider before implementing any new regimen as individual medical conditions and needs vary, and only a healthcare provider can provide tailored advice based on a comprehensive understanding of the individual's health status and medical history.