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Health Tips From Your Gastroenterologists...



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## Five Warning Signs Millennials Should Not Ignore

Fred G. is a 36-year-old postal worker with no family history of digestive disease. Over the next few years, he noted a gradual change in how his bowels moved. He had more problems with constipation - mixed with days of urgent diarrhea. He always attributed this to "something I ate." But every once in a while, he would see blood in the toilet. He assumed that at 36, this bleeding could only be hemorrhoids, and he knew hemorrhoids weren't that serious. So he put off going to his doctor. However, as the bleeding worsened and diarrhea became more of a problem as he delivered mail, he decided that it was time to see his doctor for a hemorrhoid remedy.

It didn't take his family doctor long to figure out what was wrong. On the first visit, his doctor performed a simple rectal exam. Unfortunately, the diagnosis was immediately clear as he felt a large hard mass inside the rectum, a clear sign of rectal cancer. Additional diagnostic studies, including colonoscopy with biopsy and CT scan X-ray, demonstrated that, despite his young age, he had a large rectal cancer. The cancer had already spread to his liver. This is stage 4 rectal cancer, and the prognosis is not good.

In the past, colorectal cancer was often associated with the elderly. However, recent trends have shown a concerning rise in the incidence of this disease among younger generations, particularly millennials. This alarming shift poses unique challenges regarding diagnosis, treatment, and awareness.

### What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer, often called colon cancer, is a group of cancers that affect the colon and rectum, also known as the large intestine. About one in 20 people will develop

colon cancer at some point during their lives, making this one of the most common cancers in the U.S.

These diseases usually are caused by the growth of **polyps** – small masses of cells – in the rectum or colon. Though these growths start as benign (non-cancerous), they can develop into cancerous tumors over time. Polyps tend to grow slowly, but they can become cancer after years.

Not all polyps will grow into cancer. But when they do, they tend to grow slowly – very slowly. Generally, a polyp will take over 10 years to develop into cancer. With regular screenings, we have a window of opportunity to catch polyps while they're growing and remove them, making colon cancer one of the most preventable types of cancer.



The American Cancer Society recently reported a significant increase in colorectal cancer diagnoses among individuals under 50. This trend is particularly evident in the rectum, the lowest part of the colon. Shockingly, those between 20 and 29 have seen the most significant rise.

*The ACS reports that people born in 1990 have double the risk of colon cancer and quadruple the risk of rectal cancer as people born in 1950.*

The reasons behind this surge remain a topic of debate and investigation. Some experts point to prevalent risk factors such as diabetes and obesity. Others speculate that modern dietary choices, exposure to antibiotics, or changes in the microbiome—the unique bacterial ecosystem within our bodies—might play a role. Despite the numerous theories, a definitive cause remains elusive.

The rise in young-onset colorectal cancer has spurred extensive research. Numerous cancer centers nationwide are now focusing on understanding this phenomenon better. Their goal is to determine the cause and develop effective strategies for early detection and treatment.

Awareness and timely action are crucial. Younger individuals often face delayed diagnoses, which can lead to the detection of the disease at more advanced stages, making treatment more challenging. We must listen to our bodies and seek medical advice if something feels "off."

*Symptoms such as blood in the stool, changes in bowel habits, abdominal discomfort, and unexplained weight loss should never be ignored.*

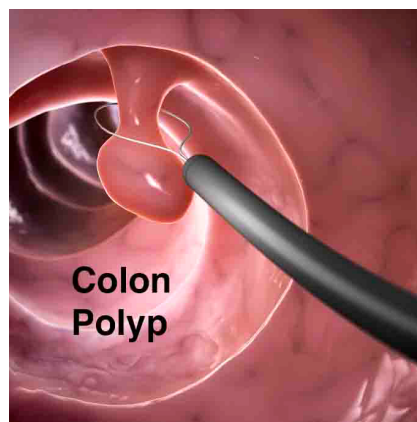
While these symptoms might not indicate a severe condition, it's always better to be safe than sorry. Historically, the public and medical professionals have held the misconception that colorectal cancer is a disease of the elderly. This belief has, unfortunately, led to delays in diagnosis and treatment for younger individuals. It's time to change this narrative. The risk of colorectal cancer in younger people must be on everyone's radar.

Screening procedures, such as colonoscopies, have played a significant role in reducing overall colorectal cancer rates. However, younger populations should be more aware of these preventive measures. It's essential to understand that early detection can save lives.

In conclusion, the rise of colorectal cancer among millennials is a pressing concern that requires collective awareness and action. By staying informed, paying attention to our bodies, and advocating for early screening, we can combat this silent rise and ensure a healthier future for the younger generation

### 5 Warning Signs

1. Blood in stool
2. Persistent constipation/diarrhea
3. Change in bowel habit
4. Abdominal discomfort
5. Unexplained weight loss



### Finally Found It!

Patients are always asking me for help in finding an online source for healthy delicious GUT FRIENDLY meals.

Gut-friendly meals are those that support the health and balance of the gut microbiota - that mix of bacteria that live happily in or digestive tract. These meals typically contain foods that are rich in fiber, probiotics, and prebiotics, and they avoid or limit foods that can be irritating or disruptive to the gut.

Well, I have been searching and found one that I can recommend on Instagram. From vibrant, crunchy salads to hearty, fiber-filled bowls that satiate and soothe, this collection is a testament to the fact that healthy can be delectable. Her simple-to-prepare meals are not just a feast for the eyes, but also a boon for your belly. If you follow Instagram, I suggest you check out and follow @flavorsbymia.

Dr. Robert Fusco

