Colon Cancer Death Rates Decline Among Blacks, but Fewer Whites Die of the Disease

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Talk about unsettling. Before 1980, fewer African Americans died of colorectal cancer than their white counterparts, but today, even with improved screening and treatments, more blacks than whites die of the illness, according to American Cancer Society (ACS) study findings published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* and reported by MedlinePlus.

For the study, an ACS research team reviewed 20 years of information gathered by the U.S. National Cancer Institute in its Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program database. Scientists compared colorectal cancer death rates between black and white Americans, specifically in early stage, mid-stage and late-stage colorectal cancer progression. (These stages are determined by whether the cancer is localized or spread throughout the body.)

Findings showed that although death rates from colon cancer decreased for both white and black patients during the past 20 years—a 33 percent dip for whites versus 5 percent for blacks—more African Americans died during each disease stage. What's more, black patients were dying in greater numbers during late-stage colorectal cancer. "Advanced-stage [or late-stage] accounts for approximately 60 percent of the overall black-white mortality disparity," note the study authors.

The reason for this difference? Researchers said it may be because black colon cancer sufferers are not getting screened or treated as often or as aggressively as white patients. What this means for African Americans is the following three things.

First, talk to your physician about getting screened for colorectal cancer then schedule and keep follow-up visits. Second, get and stay informed about the best and latest colon cancer treatments. And, third, realize it's not taboo to talk about colorectal cancer. The earlier the disease is diagnosed, the better your chances of survival.

And guess what? The same goes for any kind of cancer. Click here to read about how mammograms can help women detect breast cancer in its earliest stage.

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