

Screening Early for Colorectal Cancer Based on Family History Could Be Vital

A recent analysis suggests that family-based screening could have caught colorectal earlier in many patients.

April 22, 2020 By [Benjamin Ryan](#)

Conducting early screening for colorectal cancer among people with a family history of such malignancies may lead to earlier detection and even prevention in many cases, according to a new study led by Samir Gupta, MD, of the VA San Diego Healthcare System and the University of California, San Diego.

In many countries, colorectal cancer screening is recommended starting at age 50. Some guidelines also recommend screening for those with a first-degree family member who had colorectal cancer—starting at age 40 or 10 years before the age at which the relative was diagnosed. But few people with a family history actually get screened according to those recommendations.

Publishing their findings in the journal *Cancer*, Gupta and his colleagues studied data on people in their 40s, including 2,473 with colorectal cancer and 722 without the malignancy, who were in the Colon Cancer Family Registry between 1998 and 2007.

Twenty-five percent of those with colorectal cancer met the criteria for family-based colorectal screening. Ninety-eight percent of the people with colorectal cancer who met these criteria would have been screened at a younger age than when they were diagnosed if they had followed the family-based screening guidelines.

This means that about one in four people with colorectal cancer could have been diagnosed earlier—or even had their cancer prevented—with family-based screening.

“Our findings suggest that using family history-based criteria to identify individuals for earlier screening is justified and has promise for helping to identify individuals at risk for young-onset colorectal cancer,” Gupta said in a press release. “We have an opportunity to improve early detection and prevention of colorectal cancer under age 50 if patients more consistently collect and share their family history of colorectal cancer and health care providers more consistently elicit and act on family history.”

To read a press release about the study, [click here](#).

To read the study abstract, [click here](#).

To learn more, see [“When should I start getting colon cancer screenings?”](#)

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