

Early-Onset Colorectal Cancer: TTUHSC Expert Helps Navigate Confusing Trend

LUBBOCK, TX, UNITED STATES, May 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Colorectal

cancer is rising in younger adults. It is the leading cause of cancer death in men under 50 and the second leading cause in women under 50. Widespread attention has been brought to the growing problem of early-onset colorectal cancer-related deaths after the passing of notable

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John T. Kidwell, M.D., colon and rectal surgeon with Texas Tech Physicians

actors Chadwick Boseman, 43, and James Van Der Beek, 48. With no end in sight, many people are asking why deaths from this cancer are now more prevalent in the younger population.

John Kidwell, M.D., a colon and rectal surgeon with Texas Tech Physicians, said that while there has been a lot of thought and discussion surrounding the reasons, it still is not completely understood.

“Since 1990, there has been about a 2% increase in the detection of colon and rectal cancer in people under 50,”

Kidwell said. “The rise in the disease occurrence is possibly due to a myriad of factors related to modern lifestyle and environmental changes.”

Kidwell explained that each following generation since the 1950s has an increased likelihood of developing early-onset colorectal cancer. Dietary and lifestyle changes such as increased intake of red meat and processed foods, along with an increase in obesity and sedentary lifestyles, may predispose someone to polyp formation.

Colorectal cancer develops when abnormal tissue starts to grow along the inner lining of the large intestine through a mutation and develops into a polyp. Polyps start small, but as they continue to grow and mutate, can turn cancerous.

“If we catch polyps when they’re precancerous and remove them, that takes away their ability to mutate into cancers,” Kidwell said. “It actually decreases that person’s likelihood of developing colon or rectal cancer.”

Kidwell stressed that getting the appropriate screening based on risk factors is vital to catching

precancerous polyps.

Risk factors are broken into two categories for colorectal cancer, according to Kidwell. Modifiable risk factors include diet, lifestyle and smoking. He noted these are factors everyone has and can improve through lifestyle changes. Non-modifiable risk factors are inherent and unchanging, such as age or family history. A person's risk category should be used to determine when they should begin screenings.

"Age 45 is for average-risk individuals, meaning they have only modifiable risk factors," Kidwell said. "Age, family history, people with hereditary syndromes, people with inflammatory bowel disease, or a personal history of polyps or colorectal cancer that puts you at a higher risk of developing colon and rectal cancer in the future. And for those individuals, we do recommend screening earlier."



Dr. John Kidwell, M.D., discusses what young adults need to know about preventing colorectal cancer.

Kidwell also noted that early changes within the large intestine will most likely be asymptomatic. Small polyps will not cause any noticeable signs or symptoms but will start to appear as polyps become larger. He explained that symptoms can vary depending on the location of the cancer.

Common symptoms can include fatigue, abdominal pain, iron deficiency, anemia and unexplained weight loss. Right side colorectal cancer will cause changes in bowel movements, while left side cancer may cause more rectal bleeding and narrowed stool.

"Don't put off abnormal symptoms," Kidwell said. "It may feel awkward talking about it. You may be anxious about them, and therefore just want to put them out of your mind, but delaying addressing them can only do harm."

Talking about potential colorectal cancer symptoms can be scary for anyone. Kidwell stressed that there is no need to feel scared about talking to a doctor. It may be strange to talk about these things with someone from the general population, but it is not abnormal to share concerns with doctors.

"We're gonna make you feel comfortable, and these are important things that you need to let us

know about so we can try and help you live a long, healthy life,” Kidwell said.

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