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Over-40s: Beware of colon cancer

Age group most at risk due to diet, says expert

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PETALING JAYA: If you're aged 40 and above, don't take any risks and screen yourself for colorectal cancer, say experts.

National Cancer Society of Malaysia managing director Dr M. Murallitharan said it is most common among the middle aged, affecting one in 44 men and one in 62 women.

He said screening is an effective way to identify the cancer, noting there are several methods.

This includes the Immunochemical Faecal Occult Blood Test and even a colonoscopy, where possible.

"If you have a blood relative confirmed to have colorectal cancer, get checked.

"At the same time, adults should include colorectal cancer screening during annual health checks," he said.

According to Dr Murallitharan, consuming processed meats like nuggets and sausages increases the risk of developing colorectal cancer.

He said all cancers, including

colorectal cancer, usually take about 20 years of exposure, which means detection would usually be when the person is in their mid-40s.

"With the rising consumption of processed meats, we noticed a trend where there are patients in their mid-30s with colorectal cancer.

"Consuming chemicals in food won't give you cancer overnight but the fact remains that it will accumulate over time."

Apart from long-term consumption of processed meats, Dr Murallitharan said obesity and those with a family history of colorectal cancer are also at higher risks of contracting the cancer.

Among the symptoms of colorectal cancer, he said, are bloody stools and irregular bowel movements.

"Don't wait for these signs to show before taking action. If the symptoms are already present, it may mean that the cancer is already at an advanced stage," he said, noting how most patients only detect it at about Stage Three or Four.

Consultant colorectal surgeon

Dr Luqman Mazlan said colorectal cancer is most common among men in Malaysia and the second most common among women, citing statistics from the Malaysia National Cancer Registry report.

"The early symptoms are changes in bowel habits. If you find any abnormal patterns lasting more than two weeks, please do get checked," said the immediate past president of the Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons.

Apart from a colonoscopy, Dr Luqman said stool blood tests can detect possible instances of colorectal cancer, noting how these tests can be accessed at government or general practitioner clinics.

He said there are also stool test variations that work similar to a urine pregnancy test.

"Here, you put some of the stool in the reader and if two lines show, then it's positive for the presence of blood.

"While blood in the stool could mean anything, it should prompt you to at least have a full colonoscopy just to be sure," he said.