Microplastics May Be Fueling Colon Cancer — Here Are 2 Things You Can Do Now Transcript

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Personal Colon Cancer Wake-Up Call

So I want to tell you something that changed the way I think about prevention forever. I'll never forget, when I first joined my medical group, I had a colleague.

And I met him for the first time. He was a doc like me. he was one of the busiest doctors I knew, but he also was going through a divorce. As a result, he experienced the kind of stress that eats at you quietly.

You know, where everything at home is falling apart, while everything else at work still needs you whole. So he started having what seemed like very simple stomach issues due to stress.

But he was too overwhelmed to stop, too busy to listen to his own body. So he did what many of us do. He kept pushing. You kept fighting. A few weeks later, he finally went in for tests.

And when the test results returned, they revealed it wasn't a simple stomach issue. It was stage four colon cancer. I'm Dr. Columbus Patisse. I am an interventional cardiologist and a lifestyle advocate.

Now, what I just described is why I don't treat prevention as an afterthought. I wish I could tell you that that was the last time I saw it in someone too young, but it wasn't.

I'll never forget three fathers of my son's classmates were diagnosed with colon cancer. Two of the three? They didn't make it. Now, pause. Most stomach issues are not cancer, But persistent changes, especially under the age of 50, they deserve respect.

Microplastics and Emerging Colon Cancer Risks

They deserve attention. And here's the part that should change how we talk about prevention. Science may be pointing to a new threat. There were three studies published in 2025 and 2026 that raised a serious question.

Microplastics may one more hit on the same vulnerable terrain that drives colon cancer. Now one found microplastic in colorectal tumor tissue. Another study they found higher microplastic levels in the stool of people with colorectal cancer.

Now, third study, it shall worsen colon inflammation in animal exposure models. Let me be careful. That does not prove micro-plastics cause colo-rectal-cancer, but it tells us this is worth paying attention to.

And the good news is you're not powerless, because whether micro plastics are the new layer or not, I want to tell you something. The same biology, It keeps showing up.

the barrier, the microbiome, inflammation, oxidative stress. That's why in this episode, I'm going to give you two things you can do this week to push back.

Swap it and step it. Because this is not just about a new threat. It's about understanding the terrain and knowing where your lever is. This is just not a disease of older people anymore.

Colorectal cancer is rising in younger adults. In adults under 50 in the United States, It is now the leading cause of cancer related death. The American Cancer Society, they estimate 158,000 new cases and 55,00 deaths in 2026 alone.

So this is not random. I know what you might be thinking, doc. You're a cardiologist, you're an interventional cardiologists. Why are you talking about colon cancer?

Because it's now personal and because it is connected to what I do. That same modern pattern that raises colon risk, it often raises heart disease risk as well.

Processed food, physical inactivity, excess body fat, chronic inflammation, insulin resistance. Yes, different organ, but same upstream biology. A plastic-heavy life and a packaged food life, they tend to be about that same life.

And that's one that leads down the road of cardiometabolic disease. So let's go deeper on that new layer. The 2025 colorectal tissue study didn't just find random contamination.

Processed Meat, Fiber, and the Biology of Prevention

It found more buried microplastics in tumor tissue than in nearby healthy tissue. In the most common, PVC, polyethylene, PET, and polypropylene. Here's where it gets personal.

That deli sandwich handled with vinyl gloves and wrapped in plastic film? PVC exposure. The healthy pre-cut fruit cup in a clear clamshell? That's pet.

Hot soup or noodles in takeout container? Polypropylene. Releasing microplastics directly into your meal. That glass bottle that you thought was safe?

The plastic cap is shedding particles every time you open it. Those aren't industrial exposures. That's Tuesday lunch. The same paper reported evidence suggesting colorectal cancer cells may actively take microplastics in, not just sit beside them.

Then there was a separate case control study They found that higher fecal microplastic concentrations in colorectal cancer than in controls. Again, not proof of cause, but not something you can ignore either.

The proposed mechanisms, they actually make biological sense. You get barrier failure inside the colon, you have increased inflammation, oxidative stress, microbiome disruption, But we don't yet know the dose.

We don' t yet note the long-term burden. But what we do know is enough to act. Microplastics may be that new layer, but what's underneath it has been there for decades.

The World Cancer Research found it says that there is strong evidence that red and processed meat cause colorectal cancer and that physical activity it protects against it.

the World Health Organization piggybacks and they say that processed me causes cancer in humans. Processed meat is in the same evidence group as tobacco.

That means the strength of evidence is strong, not that the level of harm is the thing. And that distinction, it actually matters. The lowest risk dose that you can have of these products is none.

Not because one bite equals cancer, but because this is an optional exposure with strong evidence behind it. Now I want to tell you something, right? I say to my patients every single time, would you take a loved one to a hotel that has asbestos inside of it?

They all look at me in shock and horror and say, Doc, I wouldn't do that. I said, not even for a day, a week, or a few a weekend? They say never. The risk is not worth it.

And I say to you, is the risk worth if for you to eat this food that can cause the same thing that's been shown similarly to have the carcinogenic effects?

Now, I realize that some of you may not be ready for none at all, so I'd say at least make it rare. But here's the key part. Make plants your default.

Now here is where the two stories start to come together. Processed meat and microplastics, they're pushing on the same tissue. The same barrier. Same microbiome.

And the SAME inflammation pathways. Meat brings its own chemistry to the table. Heme, nitrites, bile acid stress. While micro-plastic may be adding fuel to that same fire.

So the smarter question isn't which is worse. It's why keep stacking hits on the same tissue and the diet piece goes deeper than meat. A plastic heavy life is often a packaged food life.

That means you're getting less fiber, more refined starch, or added sugar. And that really matters because fiber it's protective in ways that most people don't know.

Well, I'll tell you that when gut bacteria they ferment fiber, they produce short-chain fatty acid called butyrate. And here's where it gets remarkable.

In healthy colon cells, butyrate actually is fuel. It feeds the lining. it keeps it strong. That's the barrier protection.

Movement, Sitting, and Colorectal Risk

But in cancer cells which rewire their metabolism differently, Butyrate can't be burned the same way, so it accumulates, it enters the nucleus, and it starts behaving like a drug.

It selectively targets cancer cells, turning tumor suppressor genes back on and pushing those cells towards programmed death, while leaving healthy cells alone.

That same molecule, two completely different effects, depending upon which cell it's in, of course. And on top of that, Butyrate helps train your immune system to surveil the colon lining for early threats.

This is not eat more fiber because it's good for you. Fiber as a precision tool. Your gut microbiome as the factory that makes it. Alright, quick honesty moment.

What sneaks into your week most often? Is it deli meat? Bacon? Sausage? Fast food? Or is it just processed food. Drop it in the comments. No shame. It's all family here.

Just awareness. I'll tell you this. Diet is only half the story because you can eat well and still be sitting yourself into higher risk. That movement has been shown to protect the colon.

Sitting, it accelerates the risk, so the World Cancer Research Fund, they state that there is strong evidence that physical activity protects against colon cancer.

And a separate meta-analysis found that more sedentary time is associated with higher colorectal cancer risk, at roughly an 8% increased colon cancer for every 2 hours per day of sitting.

That's two hours. Per day. Over the years. And the part that shocks people? Sedentery time isn't, I didn't work out. It's its own exposure. When you sit for hours, your muscles stop pulling glucose efficiently.

Insulin stays elevated. In elevated insulin, it raises insulin growth like factor one, that signal that tells your colon cells what to grow and not to die.

And so here's the connection back to butyrate. Sitting also shifts the microbiome towards fewer of the bacteria that can produce butyrite, the same molecule that selectively targets the cancer cells.

Your body makes less of it the more you set. On top of all of that, There's slower transit, which means more time for whatever you don't want sitting against your golden wall.

Alright, be honest. What's your biggest sit strap? Is it work? That work chair? Commute? The couch? Name it in the comments. But here's the thing. Don't just name it.

Let's change it! Alright. We need to change all of it, the food, sitting, plastic, and pushing this on that same terrain. So the plan that I have, it targets all.

Swap and Step: Practical Prevention Plan

There are two levers. swap and step. Now in swap, the diet and the exposure level. You have to make your default a plant fiber first. Beans or lentils, vegetables, whole grains, fruits, nuts or seeds.

Start with this. Then make the following swaps. So first swap. Swap A. It's not really a swap more of a ditch. Ditch the processed meat. Swap B. Heavily packaged meal.

That means I want you more real food, less plastic contact or when practical, when you swap that. Swap C, bottle of sugary drinks for water, filter, tap coffee or tea.

And one more practical move, I need you to avoid heating your food in plastic when can. I see this almost every day in the cath lab. The American Academy of Pediatrics, they specifically advise against microwaving food and plastic.

That guidance applies to all of us. It's not just children. But here's the thing. This is not about perfection. after every time you eat. That's your entry point.

And then here's the upgrade. Every 30 to 60 minutes that you're sitting, take a two to five minute movement break. Don't hit click ignore if your work has this prompted in.

I want you to stand. Park further away, do something. Now, if you work at a desk, set a timer for about 45 minutes and when it goes off, I want you to stand up and walk.

Your weekly target, at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week. Don't forget the resistance exercise because this is about lowering your inflammation, lowering insulin stress, improving transit, feeding the healthier microbiome and taking pressure off the same biology that hurts both the colon and the heart.

When you do a SWAT plus step, at least for your colon, you're also doing it for you arteries. That means you stay away from people like me. Same habits, same biology, two diseases.

So here's how you protect yourself. If you have average risk, screening starts at 45. Now I know you've seen some of the new approved screening tools and there is now an FDA approved blood test for colon cancer screening, but it's not the best first choice for most people.

It misses too many advanced precancerous lesions. Now here's what I want you to hear. Too many younger adults are told it's just hemorrhoids. It's stress.

Irritable bowel. Upset stomach. And by the time someone finally looks, it is advanced. Don't let 45 turn into 49 before you start looking. If you have symptoms, blood in a stool, persistent changes in your bowel habits, unexplained weight loss, Ongoing abdominal pain or fatigue or strong family history.

Screening, Symptoms, and Final Takeaways

Don't wait for a guideline number get evaluate because the tragedy is not just cancer It's the time people lose pretending the body is saying nothing We have to listen to our body and that's what I want you to hold on to not the

fear the leverage If you know someone who keeps brushing off symptoms or someone running on convenience food and no movement because life won't slow down, send them this.

All right, I want you to pick one swap, one step. That's your homework for this week. Try it for two weeks. Two weeks from now, drop a comment down below and tell me one thing that changed.

Alright, comment this, my swap is, My step is. And the same terrain if you're ready to protect both. Now, if remember this if want to go fast, go alone.

If you want go far, Go together. Let's go far together by building healthier hearts and stronger communities. So like it, share it. Send it save a life.

I'll see you next time.