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האגודה למלחמה בסרט - 90336					

Screening and early diagnosis reduce colorectal cancer prevalence, mortality rates

• By JUDY SIEGEL

Although Israel is fourth among Western countries in the prevalence of colorectal cancer and 15th in the death rate from the tumor, the number of cases here has declined in the last two decades. This improvement, by 17 percent in men and 13 percent in women is largely due to early diagnosis and treatment, thanks to more publicity and education about it.

However, there has been no improvement in the Arab population, with the prevalence in colorectal cancer in that sector remaining steady

after a decline five years ago.

The figures were provided on Monday by the Israel Cancer Association, which, together with the Health Ministry and other countries around the world, marks Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March.

Half of all older Israelis undergo screening for the cancer – 41% by simple testing of occult blood in the stools (which is 100% accurate), and the rest via invasive colonoscopies.

According to the ministry's Israel Cancer Registry and National Center for Disease Control, 3,247 Israelis were diagnosed last year with col-

orectal cancer. Among them 1,437 Jewish men, 1,392 Jewish women, 154 Arab men, 127 Arab women and 137 others.

Death rates rise significantly after age 60, especially after 75, and in immigrants from Europe and the Americas, in both men and women. Survival rates, largely due to early diagnosis and treatment, is around 67% for both sexes. The number of deaths from this widespread type of cancer was 1,363 in 2010, when the last figures were available.

On March 11, between 2 and 3 p.m. on Army Radio, the ICA will run an open line

with experts available to answer questions from listeners. Public service announcements will be broadcasted, and messages published in newspaper throughout the month. Information can be obtained from the ICA's Telemeida line at 1-800-599-995.

A free seminar on the subject will be held at ICA headquarters in Givatayim on March 12, starting at 9.30 a.m.

According to recent research, the consumption of a lot of fiber from vegetables, fruits and whole grains and pulses reduces the risk of colorectal cancer. A sedentary life style and alcohol increases the risk.