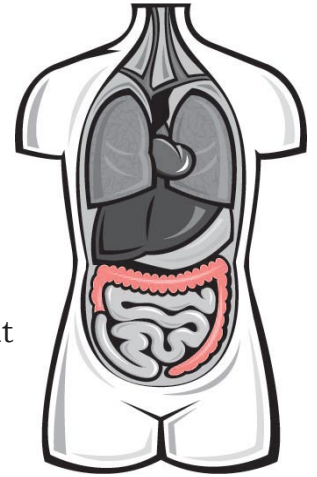


Colorectal Cancer



What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon or rectum. It's the third most common cause of cancer (excluding skin cancer) in the United States and the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Most types of colorectal cancer begin with polyps (grape-shaped growths on the lining of the colon and rectum). Removing a polyp early may prevent it from becoming cancerous.

What are the symptoms of colorectal cancer?

- In its early stages, colorectal cancer often has no symptoms.
- Some symptoms may include change in bowel habits, diarrhea, constipation or a feeling that the bowel does not empty completely.
- Other symptoms may involve bright red or very dark blood in the stool, stools that are narrower than normal, discomfort in the abdomen including frequent gas pains, bloating, fullness or cramps, weight loss with no known reason, constant and extreme tiredness, vomiting and anemia (low iron in the blood).

What are the risk factors for colorectal cancer?

- Age: chances of developing colorectal cancer increase after age 50. More than 90 percent of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer are older than 50.
- Personal history of colorectal cancer and/or colorectal polyps.
- Personal history of chronic inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) including ulcerative colitis or Crohn's Disease.
- A family history of colorectal cancer: some cancers "run in the family" because either something in the environment has contributed to the development of cancer and/or because certain family members were born with or inherited an increased susceptibility to cancer.
- Unhealthy lifestyle choices: high fat diet, lack of physical activity, obesity, smoking and heavy use of alcohol all play a role in colorectal cancer.

Who should get screened and what kinds of colorectal screening tests are available?

A person will often have no symptoms in the early stages. Screening tests are one of the most powerful weapons in detecting colorectal cancer. This is because polyps, or growths, can be detected and removed before they have the chance to turn into cancer. There are several different screening tests that can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer. Each one can be used alone; sometimes they are used in combination.

- Regular screening, beginning at age 50, is the key to detect early stage of colorectal cancer. If you are at greater risk, you may need to begin regular screening at an earlier age. Talk to your doctor about which test(s) is right for you and how often you should be tested. The best time to get screened is before any symptoms appear.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends the following screening tests and intervals for men and women aged 50–75:

- High-sensitivity fecal occult test (FOBT), which checks for hidden blood in three consecutive stool samples, should be administered every year.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy, which inspects visually the interior walls of the rectum and part of the colon, should be administered every 5 years.
- Colonoscopy, which inspects visually the interior walls of the rectum and the entire colon, should be administered every 10 years.

If you are older than 75, ask your doctor if you should be screened.

What can I do to reduce my risk for colorectal cancer?

- Screening is the most powerful tool in prevention – regular screening should begin after 50 years of age.
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods.
- Limit the intake of high-fat foods.
- Be physically active with at least 30 minutes of exercise on five or more days of the week.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Know your family’s cancer history.
- Limit alcohol consumption and avoid tobacco.

For more information on colorectal cancer, screenings and prevention, visit these links:

American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.org)

Illinois Department of Public Health (www.idph.state.il.us)



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