

What You Should Know About Colorectal Cancer

What is colorectal cancer?

- Colorectal cancer is cancer in the colon or rectum. In most people, colorectal cancer develops slowly over a period of several years. It usually begins as a small, polyp (growth) that may eventually change into cancer.

What are the facts about colorectal cancer?

- Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.
- Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in both men and women.
- Over 147,500 new cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed each year.
- More than 57,100 people die from colorectal cancer each year.

What things put people at risk for colorectal cancer?

- Age
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease or Crohn's Disease
- A personal or family history of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps
- Lack of regular physical activity
- A diet without enough fruits and vegetables
- A low-fiber / high-fat diet
- Obesity
- Alcohol use
- Tobacco use

How can you limit your risk for colorectal cancer?

- Regular testing
- Regular exercise
- Stop smoking
- Talk to your family to find out if anyone has a history of cancer
- Talk to your doctor about options for testing

When and how often should you be tested for colorectal cancer?

Testing for colorectal cancer is recommended for all adults starting at age 50. African-Americans should start at age 45.

The following tests are available:

- Colonoscopy every 10 years – This is the best test for screening.
- Fecal (stool) testing every year.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy with or without fecal testing every 5 years.

People at higher risk should start being tested at a younger age and should be tested more frequently, ideally with a colonoscopy. Talk to your doctor about your risk.

What tests are available for colorectal cancer screening?

- *Colonoscopy*: This test looks at the rectum and the entire colon using a lighted instrument called a colonoscope. This test can find growths throughout the colon. It also checks the upper part of the colon where growths would be missed by a sigmoidoscopy.
- *Fecal testing*: This is a test to check for blood in the stool. This test, when performed every 1 to 2 years in people ages 50 to 80, reduces the number of deaths due to colorectal cancer by as much as 30 percent.
- *Sigmoidoscopy*: This test looks at the rectum and the lower colon using a lighted instrument called a sigmoidoscope. This test can find growths in the rectum and lower colon only. Regular testing with a sigmoidoscope after age 50 can reduce the number of deaths from colorectal cancer.
- *Combination of fecal testing and sigmoidoscopy*: This testing combination can detect cancers and large polyps better than either method alone. It has limitations, however. Fecal testing should be done before sigmoidoscopy. This is because if you have a positive fecal test result, you should have a colonoscopy, rather than a sigmoidoscopy.

References:

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