

What Is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal Cancer is the second most common cancer in the United States, affecting 150,000 people annually.

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in either the colon or the rectum which is part of the digestive system, also called the GI (gastrointestinal) system. Colon and rectal cancers specifically affect the large intestine or the rectum. The large intestine or colon is responsible for absorbing water and nutrients from food and storing waste products. The rectum is the part of the digestive system that allows waste to pass out of the body through the anus.

How does Colorectal Cancer Develop?

Most of these cancers start as a *polyp* – a growth of tissue that starts in the lining of the colon or rectum and then continues to grow into the center. Not all polyps are cancerous, however over 95% of all colorectal cancers are from an *adenocarcinoma*-- a polyp that has become cancerous. There are some other types, more rare, that result from a tumor of the colon and/or rectum.

How do I know I have Colorectal Cancer?

- Rectal bleeding
 - Abdominal pain
 - Changes in bowel habits
 - Constipation or diarrhea
 - Weight loss
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What can fix it?

The 4 main types of treatment for colorectal cancer are:

- 1) Surgery
- 2) Radiation Therapy
- 3) Chemotherapy
- 4) Targeted therapies

Who is at risk for Colorectal Cancer?

- People over the age of 50
- Personal history of recurrent/multiple polyps
- Personal history of inflammatory bowel diseases; *Ulcerative Colitis*, *Crohn's Disease*
- Unknown family history or Family history of colorectal cancer
- Genetic Syndromes:
 - *Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP)*
 - *Hereditary Non-Polyposis Colorectal Cancer (HNPCC)*
- Diets high in red meat (beef, lamb, or liver) and processed meats (hotdogs, bologna, and lunch meat)
- Cooking meats at very high heat (frying, broiling, or grilling)
- Lack of exercise
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Heavy consumption of alcohol

How can I prevent Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is extremely **preventable** if the polyps that lead to the cancer are detected and removed. Colonoscopies can prevent cancer by removing pre-cancerous growths during the procedure. The procedure is a low-risk, well tolerated 15-45 minute outpatient procedure that is done under mild sedation.

Regular colonoscopy screenings are recommended after the age of 50. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer colonoscopy screening should begin at the age 40.

How can I learn more?

You can also find information through the American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) at <http://www.fascrs.org/patients/conditions/>

Do you have any questions or comments for your doctor?
