

Colon Cancer

Warning signals

- Rectal bleeding
- Blood in stools
- Change in bowel habits

Incidence In The United States

- In the United States approximately 148,810 cases of large bowel cancer diagnoses and approximately 45,500 new cases of rectal cancer.
- Second leading cause of death from cancer.
- 20 to 30 % of US families are affected.
- Risk increases with age, starting at the age of 40.
- More than 94% of all cases occur after the age of 50.
- Occurs about equally in both sexes.
- Common in most Western hemispheric countries but rare in Asia, Africa, and South America (due to diet).
- The colorectal cancer death rate in the American black population has almost doubled in the last 30 years and now equals that in whites.

Mortality

53,000 deaths from colon cancer and 7,500 from rectal cancer.

Risk factors

1. High-fat and/or low-fiber diet.
2. Meat and animal proteins.
3. Polyps in the colon.
4. Personal or family history of colorectal cancer or inflammatory bowel disease, such as ulcerative colitis.
5. **Familial polyposis.** This deadly form of colon cancer occurs in families. Polyps tend to form at a very young age, usually around puberty. Cancer then develops about 15 years after the onset of the polyps.
6. Family cancer syndrome. Families who have a propensity to develop uterine, breast, or colon cancer appear to be at high risk for the development of colon cancer and should be identified and screened regularly.
7. Lack of activity (i.e. no regular exercise).
8. Certain chemicals (Benzopyrenes, Nitrosamines).
9. Cholesterol in foods.
10. Smoking and passive smoking

Early Detection

Because colorectal cancer develops over a period of time, detection of the disease is possible long before symptoms appear. Early detection of small cancers and polyps reduces the likelihood of major surgery.

When caught early, colon cancer is 88% curable and rectal cancer 80% curable.

Digital rectal exam

This exam is performed by your doctor using a gloved finger to feel for tumors in the lower part of the rectum. Ten percent of tumors in the colon and rectum are detected by this exam. This should be part of your annual physical. The exam is also useful for examining the prostate in men and detecting ovarian or other gynecological problems in women.

It is recommended by the American Cancer Society to have this test every year after the age of 40.

Fecal occult-blood testing

The stool blood slide test is a simple method to test feces for hidden blood. The specimen is obtained by the physician during the Digital rectal exam and analyzed for minute traces of blood.

It is recommended to have this exam every year after the age of 40.

Colonoscopy

The colonoscopy is an examination of the lower part of the gastrointestinal tract, which is called the colon or large intestine (bowel). The colonoscopy is a safe procedure that provides information other test may not be able to get.

The procedure generally takes between 20 minutes and 1 hour.

Colon Cancer

The reasons that a colonoscopy is performed are to evaluate the following:

- As a screening exam for colon cancer in anyone over age 50
- Blood in the stool or rectal bleeding
- Dark black stools
- Persistent diarrhea
- Iron-deficiency anemia
- Significant unexplained weight loss
- Family history of colon cancer
- History of previous colon polyps or colon cancer
- Surveillance in people with ulcerative colitis
- For the medical management of chronic inflammatory bowel disease, and lastly
- Unexplained chronic abdominal pain