

# HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



## What Is Colorectal Cancer? Who Is Impacted?

**Colorectal (KOH-loh-REK-tul) cancer is cancer of the colon—which is a long tube that absorbs water and cleans your body of waste.**



### Stomach:

Breaks down food

### Small Intestine:

Breaks down food even more

### Colon:

Where stools are formed

### Rectum:

Where stools are stored before a bowel movement

Your colon and rectum make up what is called your large intestine (in-TES-tin). The large intestine is the final place where food is processed after you eat. It is also where stools are formed. About 1 in 15 people get colorectal cancer in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Your chances of surviving colorectal cancer when it is caught early are very high—more than 90%.<sup>2</sup> Talk to your doctor about what tests you should have to check or screen for colorectal cancer.

### What is Cancer?

There are many kinds of cancer. Cancer means the growth and spread of cells that are not normal. Each of us has trillions of cells that allow our body to carry on normal functions like breathing, digesting, and thinking. When cells stop behaving normally, they can become cancer cells.

Colorectal cancer is when a tumor grows in the large intestine. The large intestine is a long tube (4 to 5 feet long). The longest part of this tube is called the colon; the last few inches of the tube is the rectum.

### Who Gets Colorectal Cancer?

**Age is the number one risk factor for colorectal cancer (it increases your chances of getting cancer). You should be screened (tested) at age 50.**

**You also have a greater chance of getting colorectal cancer if:**

- Your parents, brothers, sisters, or children have had colorectal cancer. Your doctor may recommend screening or testing at a younger age if this is the case.
- You have polyps (PAH-lips), which are small balloon-shaped pouches in the colon or rectum that may contain cancer cells. Polyps usually don't cause symptoms (a symptom is a change in the body due to illness) but can be felt or seen if your doctor tests for them. If polyps are found, your doctor can remove them. Polyps are not always cancerous.<sup>4</sup>
- You have had colorectal cancer or polyps that are cancerous before.
- Have ulcerative colitis (UHL-ser-uh-TIV koh-LI-tiss) or Crohn's (Kronze) disease, which cause inflammation in the colon or small intestine.
- You are African-American.



# What Is Colorectal Cancer? Who Is Impacted?

There are over 1 million survivors of colorectal cancer in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The most powerful weapon against colon cancer is screening or testing.

## Some Signs of Colorectal Cancer

These are some of the symptoms of colorectal cancer:

- A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea or constipation
- You feel like you still have to go, after you've had a bowel movement
- Blood in your stool (bowel movement)
- Stomach cramping or bloating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Feeling tired or fatigued all the time

Keep in mind that there are many other conditions that may cause these symptoms. Make sure you see your doctor.

## What Can I Do to Prevent Colorectal Cancer?<sup>3</sup>

Screening, can save lives—colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable and curable cancers if found early.<sup>2</sup> Start getting screened at age 50, or earlier if there is colorectal cancer in your family or if you have had colorectal cancer before. Other ways to prevent cancer include eating a healthy diet, being more active, and losing extra weight.

## Notes/Questions For Your Doctor:

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### References

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4. NIHSeniorHealth. "Colorectal Cancer: Causes and Risk Factors." Available at: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/colorectalcancer/causesandriskfactors/04.html> Accessed June 25 2007.



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