



COLORECTAL CANCER FACT SHEET

What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers in the United States, striking approximately 146,000 people annually and causing an estimated 51,000 deaths. However, when detected and treated early, colorectal cancer is curable.

Colorectal cancer refers to cancer of the colon or rectum. The colon and rectum make up the lower end of the digestive tract. The colon is often referred to as the large intestine. The rectum is the lower six to eight inches of the large intestine which ends at the anus. The colon, rectum and anus act as the body's waste disposal system.

Who is at risk?

Colorectal cancer may occur at any time, although more than 90% of patients with it are over age 50. In addition to age, other high-risk factors include a family history of colorectal cancer and polyps or cancer of other organs, especially the breast and uterus. One in every 20 Americans will develop colorectal cancer at some time in their lives, and women and men are equally affected. Anyone with a parent, brother or sister with colorectal cancer is at an increased risk to develop this cancer.

What are the symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?

The earliest warning sign of colorectal cancer is: NOTHING. When the cancer is most treatable and curable, it exhibits no symptoms. As a result, regular checkups and screenings are very important in the fight against colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer may also cause:

- Blood in the stool (either bright red or very dark in color)
- Change in bowel habits
- Unexplained weight loss
- Stools that are smaller in width than usual

No one should ever assume that rectal bleeding is caused by hemorrhoids!

What causes Colorectal Cancer?

The exact cause of colorectal cancer is unknown; however, studies indicate that a high-fat, low-fiber diet may increase your chances of getting colorectal cancer.

COLORECTAL CANCER (continued)

Can Colorectal Cancer be prevented?

The best way to reduce your risk of getting colorectal cancer is to have regular physical examinations.

The American Cancer Society recommends:

- A digital rectal examination every year starting at age 40.
- A stool blood test every year starting at age 50.
- A rectal exam every 3 to 5 years after age 50, following two annual examinations with negative results.

Such examinations will help your physician determine whether a colorectal polyp or cancer is present. Since nearly all colon and rectal cancers begin in benign polyps, it is important to remove the polyps when detected. In most cases, polyps can be removed during a simple outpatient procedure.