

What you need to know about

# Colon Cancer



## Overview and Facts

- Colorectal Cancer is the 3rd most common type of non-skin cancer in **men** (after prostate cancer and lung cancer) and in **women** (after breast cancer and lung cancer).
- Colorectal Cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer death in the United States after lung cancer.
- The rate of new colorectal cancer cases and deaths is decreasing in the United States.

**A health coach can help you meet your healthy lifestyle goals**

**Call a TML IEBP Professional Health Coach at 1-888-818-2822**

**C**olorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the large intestine. It is a disease in which cells in the colon become abnormal and divide forming a mass called a tumor.

### Colorectal Cancer Screening

Colorectal cancer screening can detect cancer, polyps, or other abnormal cell growth. Finding and removing polyps or other areas of abnormal cells may be one of the most effective ways to identify the risk of colon cancer. Completing the fecal occult blood test (FOBT) yearly may promote early detection. If colon cancer is found early, it is generally more treatable and less likely to spread. Living a healthy lifestyle and participating in your wellness program by taking the fecal occult blood test (FOBT) yearly can help promote early detection.

Two of the most common screening tests include:

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)** – This test can detect small amounts of blood in the stool, which can be indicative of cancer.
- **Colonoscopy** – A colonoscope can examine the rectum and lower colon. A biopsy of abnormal areas or polyps can be performed during the procedure.

***A yearly Fecal Occult Blood Test can help promote early detection.***

### Risk Factors

- Age over 50
- Polyps
- Personal or family history
- History of inflammatory bowel disease, ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Diet high in fat, calories, and low in fiber
- Smoking

**Disclaimer:** This material is for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional medical advice. Always consult your physician before beginning a new treatment, diet, or fitness program. This information should not be considered complete, nor should it be relied on in diagnosing or treating a medical condition.

### Signs and Symptoms

A common symptom of colorectal cancer is a change in bowel habits. Symptoms include:

- Having diarrhea or constipation
- Feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Finding blood (either bright red or very dark) in your stool
- Finding your stools are narrower than usual
- Frequently having gas pains or cramps, or feeling full or bloated
- Losing weight with no known reason
- Feeling very tired all the time
- Having nausea or vomiting

Most often, these symptoms are not due to cancer. Other health problems can cause the same symptoms. If you have these symptoms, you should see a healthcare provider to be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

Usually, early cancer does not cause pain. Do not wait to feel pain before seeing a healthcare provider.

### Causes

- The exact cause of colorectal cancer is not known.
- Sometimes healthcare providers cannot explain why one person develops this disease and another does not.
- You cannot catch this disease from another person.
- Most colon cancers begin as noncancerous polyps, which then slowly develop into cancer.

# Colon Cancer

## Treatment & Care

### Communication with your Healthcare Provider

- Report any changes in your bowel habits to your provider.
- Following your healthcare provider's plan of care optimizes your health outcome.
- If you are working with a professional healthcare coach, share their suggestions with your healthcare provider.

### Support & Resources

Living with a serious disease such as colon cancer is not easy.

- If you have questions about treatment, working or other activities, ask your health care team.
- If you want to talk about your feeling or concerns, meet with a social worker, counselor, or member of the clergy.
- If needed, a social worker can suggest resources for financial aid, home care, transportation or emotional support.
- Support groups can offer support in person, over the telephone, or over the Internet.

### Resources

- **National Cancer Institute (NCI)**  
1-800-4-CANCER and LiveHelp at [livehelp.cancer.gov/app/chat/chat\\_launch](http://livehelp.cancer.gov/app/chat/chat_launch) can help you locate programs, services, and publications.
- For a list of organizations offering support, see NCI's database: [supportorgs.cancer.gov](http://supportorgs.cancer.gov).
- NCI Booklet | Taking Time: Support for People with Cancer. Download [www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/takingtime](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/takingtime)
- Tests to Detect Colorectal Cancer and Polyps  
[www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/detection/colorectal-screening](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/detection/colorectal-screening)

The type of treatment depends on the location of the tumor and the stage of the disease. Treatment for colorectal cancer may involve surgery, chemotherapy, biological therapy or radiation therapy. Sometimes a combination of these treatments is ordered.

Cancer treatment is either local therapy or systemic therapy:

- **Local Therapy** – Surgery and radiation therapy are local therapies. They remove or destroy cancer in or near the colon.
- **Systemic Therapy** – Chemotherapy and biological therapy are systemic therapies. By entering the bloodstream, these drugs destroy or control cancer.

### Surgery

Surgery is the most common treatment for colorectal cancer.

- When a section of your colon or rectum is removed, the surgeon can usually reconnect the healthy parts.
- If reconnection is not possible, the surgeon can create a new path for waste to leave your body. The surgeon will create an opening (stoma) in the wall of the abdomen, connects the upper end of the intestine to the opening, and close the other end. This operation is called a colostomy. A bag fits over the stoma to collect waste material. A colostomy maybe temporary or permanent, depending on your clinical circumstances.

### Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the use of anticancer drugs to kill cancer cells. The drugs enter the bloodstream and can kill cancer cells all over the body.

### Biological Therapy

A monoclonal antibody, a type of biological therapy, can be given to people whose cancer has spread. The monoclonal antibodies bind to colorectal cancer cells. They interfere with the growth of cancer cells and can help prevent the spread of cancer.

### Radiation Therapy

Radiotherapy uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells. It only affects cancer cells in the treated area.

### Lifestyle Changes



### Diet

It is important to eat well.

- Increase intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, fish, nonfat dairy products, nuts, and seeds.
- Decrease consumption of trans fats and hydrogenated oils.
- Decrease sweets and sugary beverages.
- Maintain a healthy weight. A normal body mass index (BMI) is thought to be between 18.5-24.9.

### Physical Activity

- Stay as active as your health permits.
- Some activities that can keep you strong and increase your energy are walking, yoga, swimming, etc.
- Participate in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Check with your healthcare provider for recommended guidelines before starting any physical activity particularly if you have any preexisting conditions.

### Behavioral Changes

- Stop smoking.
- If you drink alcohol, be mindful of your intake. Moderate. **Women** should drink no more than 1 alcoholic drink per day and **men** should drink no more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day.