



Frequently Asked Questions About Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and it is a great time to learn more about colorectal cancer. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions, and please ask your healthcare provider if you have additional questions.

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that originates from polyps in the colon or rectum. Polyps are pre-cancerous growths that occur in the lining of the colon and rectum.

How common is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer overall, and is the second leading cause of cancer related deaths in The United States of America (USA). This year in the USA, more than 140,000 people will be diagnosed, and more than 53,000 will die from colorectal cancer. In fact, more women over the age of 75 die from colorectal cancer than from breast cancer. Approximately 25% of the US population (roughly 80,000,000 – 90,000,000 Americans) are considered at risk for development of colorectal cancer because of increasing age or other risk factors. (American Cancer Society website)

What causes colorectal cancer?

The exact causes of colorectal cancer are unknown, but the disease appears to be linked to both inherited and lifestyle factors as well as aging. Inherited factors include genetic background, and these factors influence a person's susceptibility to develop cancer. Lifestyle factors (diet, cigarette smoking, lack of physical exercise, and obesity) may determine which at-risk individuals go on to develop colorectal cancer. Most of the time, there is no specific identifiable cause as to why a person developed colorectal cancer, and it is often due to random genetic changes that have occurred in the cells that line the colon or rectum.

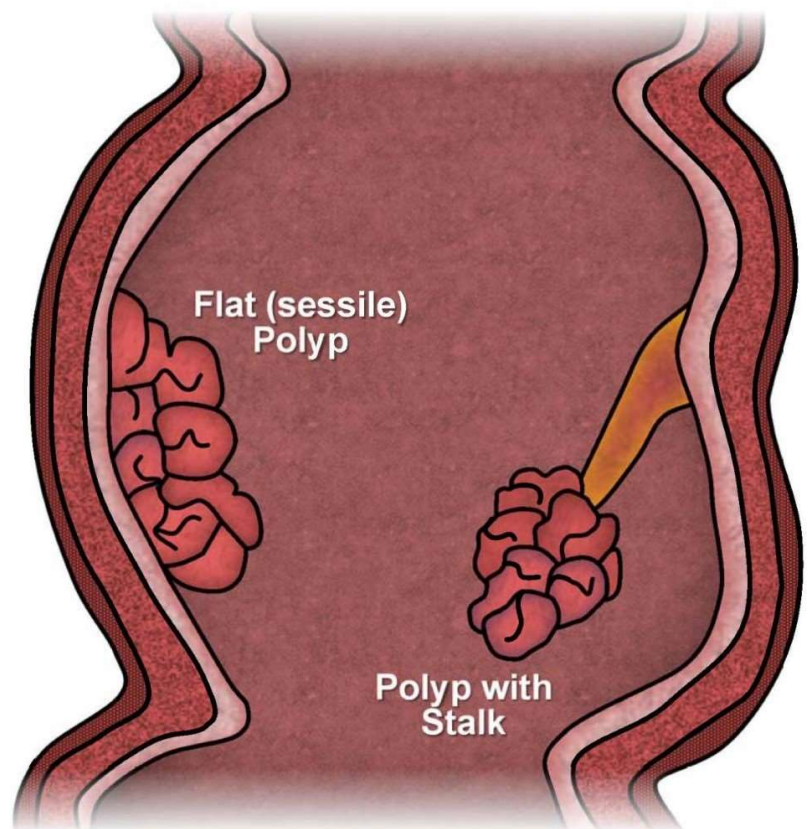
What is a polyp?

Polyps are mushroom-like growths that form in the inner lining of the colon. The lining of the colon is coated with cells, and polyps form when these cells grow, divide, and reproduce in an unhealthy and disordered way. Although not all polyps are dangerous, some polyps can turn into cancer over time. Untreated cancer can then invade the colon wall, its surrounding blood vessels, and then spread to other parts of the body.

Who is at risk for colorectal cancer?

People age 50 or older are at risk of developing colorectal cancer, and the risk is almost the same for men and women. People who have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer include people with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps, and anyone who has a long-term personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease).

How can you prevent colorectal cancer?



The best way to protect yourself from developing colorectal cancer is to see your doctor for yearly screenings if you are age 45* or older. Your doctor can perform colorectal cancer screenings, which can identify and remove pre-cancerous polyps to prevent the development of colorectal cancer.

Although no diet or lifestyle can completely protect someone from developing colorectal cancer, some factors to decrease your risk include: maintaining a diet high in fruits, vegetables and fiber and low in animal fats, getting regular exercise, avoiding cigarette smoking, and limiting alcohol consumption.

*In 2018, secondary to new data on the increased risks of colorectal cancer in those under 50, the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgery changed recommendations to consider starting screening at age 45 instead of age 50.

What are the screening options for detecting colorectal cancer?

Screening tests are the best option to find and remove polyps before they can become cancer, or to detect an early stage cancer when treatment can be most effective.

Several screening options exist. These include the fecal occult blood test (FOBT), fecal immunochemical test (FIT), flexible sigmoidoscopy, double contrast barium enema, and colonoscopy. Patients should talk to their colorectal surgeon or other healthcare provider to find out which screening method is right for them.

WHAT IS A COLON AND RECTAL SURGEON?

Colon and Rectal Surgeons are experts in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of conditions of the colon, rectum, and anus. Board-certified colon and rectal surgeons have completed residencies in both General Surgery and Colon and Rectal Surgery, and have passed intensive examinations conducted by the American Board of Surgery and the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery. This advanced surgical training makes them well-versed in the treatment of both benign and malignant diseases of the colon, rectum, and anus, and they are able to perform routine screening examinations and surgically treat conditions when needed.

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