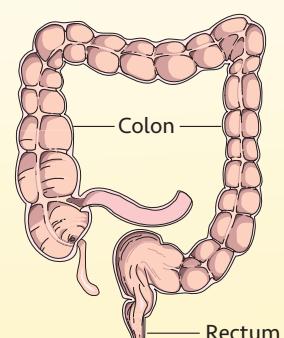




# Colon & rectal cancers

The colon and rectum form the large bowel. The colon is the upper 5 to 6 feet. The rectum is the last 6 to 8 inches.

When abnormal cells grow in the colon or rectum, a cancerous tumor may form. These tumors grow slowly. They may get big and block the bowel.



Colon and Rectum

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Colon and rectal cancers can occur without clear symptoms. For this reason, screening is important. When symptoms occur, they include:

- A change in bowel habits that lasts more than a few days, including diarrhea or constipation
- Frequent gas pains, cramps, bloating, or feelings of fullness in the abdomen
- Red or dark blood in or on the stool or rectal bleeding. Pencil thin stools.
- Fatigue and/or iron deficiency anemia in men and older women
- A feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Weight loss for no known reason



## CAUSES, RISK FACTORS & CARE

### Risk factors:

- Polyps (benign growths that can become cancerous over time). Most colon and rectal cancers develop from polyps.
- Family history of colon or rectal cancer. Unless it is treated, an inherited condition called Familial Polyposis puts a person at a very high risk.
- Having ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Aging. Colon and rectal cancers occur most often in people over age 50.
- Smoking. Heavy alcohol use.
- Eating a diet high in red meats and processed meats
- Lack of exercise and/or being overweight or obese

### Care:

Finding and treating the cancer early is vital. Treatment includes:

- Surgery, including cryosurgery: During this procedure, radio waves travel through electrodes to heat and destroy abnormal cells.
- Chemotherapy: This uses medicines to destroy cancer cells.
- Radiation therapy: This therapy uses high doses of radiation to kill cancer cells and stop them from spreading.
- Targeted therapy: This uses drugs to attack specific cells.
- Immunotherapy: This helps your immune system fight and destroy cancer cells.



## PREVENTION

Colon and rectal cancers are completely curable if found early. Have screening tests beginning at age 45, as advised by your doctor:

- High-sensitivity fecal occult blood test
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- DNA test stool

How often testing needs to be done depends on the test(s) given. {**Note:** If you have a family history of colon polyps or colon or rectal cancers, or a condition associated with a higher risk of colorectal cancer, screening tests may need to be started sooner than age 45.}

- Have colon polyps removed.
- Eat plenty of fruits, veggies, and whole grains. Limit red and processed meat.

## SELF-CARE

- Schedule and go to follow-up exams.
- Join a cancer support group.
- Keep up with your daily routine, like going to work, spending time with family and friends, and taking part in activities. Do things that are fun and bring you joy.
- Get regular physical activity to help keep you strong and feeling good.
- Eat a healthy, mostly plant-based diet.

## CONTACT DOCTOR WHEN:

- You have any symptoms of colon and rectal cancer.
- You need to schedule screening tests for colon and rectal cancer. Follow the schedule your doctor advises.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The National Cancer Institute  
800-4-CANCER (422-6237)  
[cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)

The American Cancer Society  
800-227-2345  
[cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

