

Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cancer killer of men and women combined in the United States. More than 90 percent of colorectal cancer cases are discovered in people over the age of 50. Screening is essential to diagnosing colorectal cancer because the disease lacks symptoms in the early stages. It is estimated that 60 percent of colorectal cancer deaths could be prevented if all men and women over the age of 50 were screened routinely. Colorectal cancer develops in the cells lining the colon and rectum. The stage is based on the extent of the spread of cancer through deeper layers, lymph nodes, and surrounding structures.

Statistics

- In 2011, an estimated 141,210 cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in the United States.
- An estimated 49,380 people in the United States will die from colorectal cancer in 2011.
- The five-year survival rate for colorectal cancer discovered early and before the cancer spreads is 91 percent, but because of low screening rates, only 39 percent of colorectal cancers are identified in this early stage.
- In Texas, colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths, with 7,583 new cases and 3,082 deaths expected in 2011.

Risk Factors

- **Age:** People over the age of 50 have a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer.
- **Family History:** People with close relatives who have had colorectal cancer are at a greater risk of developing the disease. Those with a family history should consult a doctor about the frequency of screening.
- **Diet:** Overweight people are at a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer. A high-fat diet can increase the risk of developing colorectal cancer, including diets that contain large amounts of red and processed meats.
- **Health:** Diabetes has been linked to an increased risk of colorectal cancer. People with a history of polyps and inflammatory bowel disease are also at an increased risk of colorectal cancer.
- **Lynch Syndrome:** This inherited condition affecting the body's genes increases the likelihood of a colorectal cancer diagnosis. Lynch syndrome is responsible for up to 5 percent of colorectal cancers, and those with the condition are up to 80 percent more likely to have colorectal cancer than those without Lynch syndrome. Genetic testing is available to determine if a person has the gene mutation associated with Lynch syndrome.

Symptoms

Typically, people in the early stages of colorectal cancer do not have symptoms; symptoms become apparent as the disease advances. If a person experiences any of the following symptoms, he or she should consult a physician immediately:

- Abnormal bowel habits
- Cramping or stomach discomfort
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Fatigue
- Frequent gas or feeling bloated
- Blood in the stool
- Feeling of weakness
- Stools that are smaller than usual

Prevention

- Screening:
 - Men and women age 50 and older with an average risk for developing colorectal cancer should have at least one of the five screening tests: annual fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT); flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years; double-contrast barium enema every five years; or colonoscopy every 10 years.
- Lifestyle:
 - Maintaining a regular exercise schedule and healthy diet may decrease the risk of colorectal cancer. A healthy diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limited consumption of high-fat foods, red meat, and alcohol.
 - Use aspirin and other related drugs in moderation. Studies suggest that aspirin and drugs such as ibuprofen or naproxen prevent the growth of polyps. Consult your doctor about what is best for you.

Treatment Options

There are four main types of treatment for colorectal cancer: surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapies. Specific needs may be addressed by surgeons, gastroenterologists, or medical or radiation oncologists. For complex treatments, a team of specialists may be involved.

Sources: American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute, and Texas Cancer Registry



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