



Colorectal cancer fact sheet

The Colon

The colon and rectum make up the large intestine, the long muscular tube that food passes through during digestion. The colon is the upper five to six feet of the large intestine. The rectum is the bottom six to eight inches.

Colon Cancer

Colon cancer occurs when cells in the colon grow out of control. It often starts as a small non-cancerous tumor called an adenomatous polyp. Some screening tests can detect and remove adenomatous polyps.

Burden of Disease

- Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the US, accounting for approximately 48,000 deaths each year.
- Over 97,000 Americans will be diagnosed with colon cancer this year.
- Colon cancer is the third most common cancer among men and women in the US.
- Men and women are at equal risk of developing colon cancer.
- 90% of colon cancer occurs in individuals over age 50.
- Although overall colon cancer mortality rates in the US have dropped by 21% over the past 20 years, mortality rates for African Americans have risen by 9%.

Prevention

- Nearly 75% of colon cancer occurs in people without medical risk factors, suggesting that colon cancer can be prevented through lifestyle changes.
- The most effective behaviors for lowering the risk of colon cancer, without raising the risk of other complications or diseases, are:
 - Getting screened regularly after age 50
 - Being more physically active
 - Eating less red meat
 - Taking a daily multivitamin that contains folic acid
- Over 50% of all colon cancers can be prevented through lifestyle changes and the implementation of widespread screening.

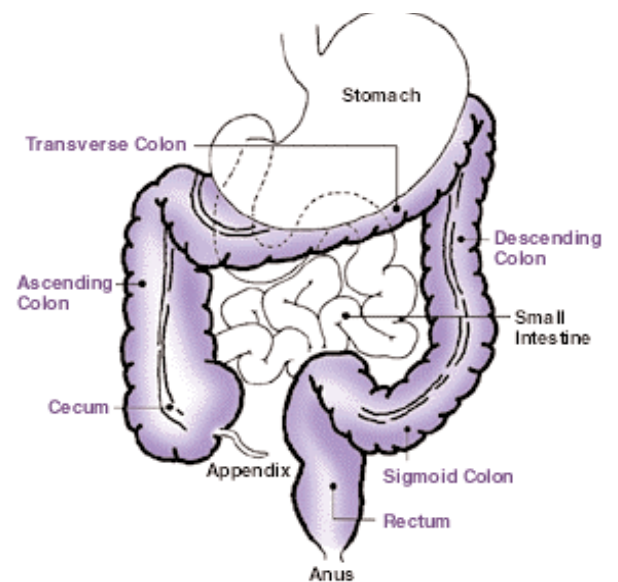


Diagram of the Colon and Rectum

Screening

- Recommended screening tests include fecal occult blood testing (FOBT), flexible sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, and double-contrast barium enema.
- Beginning at age 50, men and women should get screened regularly. Men and women at high risk may need to be screened more often and at an earlier age.
- The risk of dying from colon cancer is reduced by more than 33% among people over age 50 who get screened regularly.
- Although colonoscopy and barium enema are effective screening tests, data are still limited on their use in population-based screening programs.
- Getting screened annually with FOBT is associated with a 33% reduction in colon cancer mortality.
- Getting screened every five years with flexible sigmoidoscopy is associated with a 50% reduction in colon cancer mortality and a 40% reduction in colon cancer incidence, due to the removal of pre-cancerous polyps.

Risk Factors

Behavioral factors that lower the risk of colon cancer include:

- Regular screening
- Regular physical activity
- Long-term use of a multivitamin that contains folic acid
- High vegetable intake
- Long-term use of aspirin

Behavioral factors that raise the risk of colon cancer include:

- High red meat intake
- Obesity
- High alcohol intake

Other factors that raise the risk of colon cancer include:

- A personal or family history of colorectal cancer
- A personal history of adenomatous polyps
- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Height