

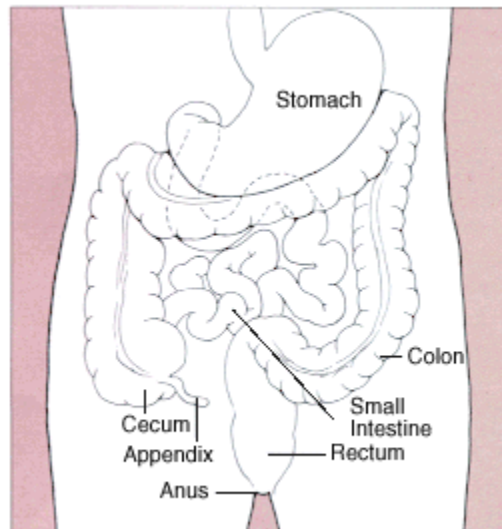
## March Is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month



*Emblem introduced in 2004 by the Colon Cancer Alliance*

### What Is Colorectal Cancer?

The colon and rectum are parts of the body's digestive system. They remove water and salts from food and store stool (feces) until it passes out of the body. Colorectal cancer occurs in the colon or rectum when the cells become abnormal and divide without control or order, forming a mass called a tumor.



Colon, rectum, and other parts of digestive system

### What Are the Key Statistics About Colorectal Cancer?

The lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is about 1 in 23 for men and 1 in 25 for women. In the United States, colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in men and the fourth leading cause in women, but it's the second most common cause of cancer deaths when numbers for men and women are combined. In 2024, it is estimated that 152,810 new cases will be diagnosed, and 53,010 people will die from colorectal cancer.

### Who's At Risk for Colorectal Cancer?

The exact causes of colorectal cancer are not known. However, studies show that certain factors are linked to an increased chance of developing colorectal cancer:

- **Age** - Colorectal cancer is more likely to occur as people get older. Although the disease can occur at any age, most people who develop colorectal cancer are over the age of 50.
- **Personal or family history** – Hereditary and medical factors that increase risk include:
  - Personal or family history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps
  - Certain inherited genetic syndromes (Lynch Syndrome)

- Personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease)
- Type 2 diabetes

If you are concerned about your family history of colon cancer, genetic counseling is available through The Hereditary Oncology Prevention and Evaluation (HOPE) program at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey. To schedule an appointment, please call 732-235-7110.

- **Diet** - Research suggests that the development of colorectal cancer may be linked with heavy alcohol consumption and diet that is high in red or processed meats, and low in calcium, whole-grain fiber, fruits, and vegetables.
- **Inactive Lifestyle** - Some research suggests that an inactive lifestyle may be linked with an increased risk of colorectal cancer. In contrast, people who exercise regularly may have a decreased risk of getting colorectal cancer.
- **Being overweight or obese**
- **Smoking**

### **Can Colorectal Cancer Be Found Early?**

Yes! Screening means checking for health problems before they cause signs or symptoms. Screening can find polyps that may in time become cancerous (precancerous polyps), as well as some cancers in an early stage, before they spread to other parts of the body. If screening detects an abnormality, diagnosis and treatment can occur quickly. Finding and removing early colon cancers before it has spread is almost always curative.

Beginning at age 45, both men and women should follow 1 of these 7 testing schedules:

- yearly guaiac-based fecal occult blood test (gFOBT) yearly fecal immunochemical test (FIT)
- stool DNA test (sDNA) every 3 years
- flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years
- colonoscopy every 10 years
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy) every 5 years

If you are at high risk of colon cancer based on family history or other factors, you may need to be screened using a different schedule. Talk with your health care provider about your history and the testing plan that's best for you.

### **What are Signs and Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?**

See your doctor if you have any of these warning signs:

- Bleeding from your rectum
- Blood in the stool or in the toilet after you have a bowel movement
- A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool, that lasts for more than a few days
- Cramping pain in your lower abdomen
- A feeling that you still need to have a bowel movement that doesn't go away after you have one
- A low red blood count (anemia) without another obvious explanation

Other conditions can cause these symptoms. You should be checked by your healthcare provider to find the reasons for your symptoms.

### **Can Colorectal Cancer Be Prevented?**

The current American Cancer Society recommendations for good nutrition and physical activity are important to colorectal cancer prevention.

- Eat a variety of healthy foods, with emphasis on plant sources
- Be physically active
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Limit use of alcoholic beverages

### **Cancer Prevention Trials at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey**

If you would like information about clinical trials for preventing cancer, please call Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey’s Office of Human Research Services at 732-235-7356. For additional information about nationwide cancer prevention trials, you can call the National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4 CANCER or visit their website at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov).

### **Where Can I Find Further Information?**

The Resource and Learning Center                      732-235-9639  
[www.cinj.org/rlc](http://www.cinj.org/rlc)  
 Provides reliable, relevant and current information about all aspects of cancer.

National Cancer Institute                                      1-800-4-CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

The American Cancer Society                                1-800-ACS-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American Institute for Cancer Research                1-800-843-8114  
[www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)

National Institute of Health                                    301-496-4000  
[www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)

Colon Cancer Alliance (CCA)                                877-422-2030  
<http://www.ccalliance.org/>

MedlinePlus  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)



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