



COLON CANCER FACTS

■ WHAT IS COLON CANCER?

Cancers that begin in the lower bowel are called colon cancers. The colon is the last 4-6 feet of your intestine and is the organ that helps eliminate solid waste from your body. The last 6 inches of the colon is called the rectum. Cancers that start there are called rectal cancers. Colon and rectal cancers will cause over 56,000 deaths this year; only lung cancer will kill more Americans. **Upwards of 75% of colon and rectal cancers occur in persons without a history of colon cancer.** The good news is that 90% of all colon and rectal cancers can be prevented with appropriate screening.

■ WHAT CAUSES CANCER?

Cancer is a disease of your genes. Cancers of all types, including those of the colon, begin when **genes that regulate how cells grow stop working.** There are many factors that may increase the risk of genetic abnormalities that lead to cancer.

■ WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COLON CANCER?

Not everyone with colorectal cancer experiences symptoms, especially in the early stages of the disease. Fortunately, **most colon cancers develop from small growths called "polyps" and these polyps can be found and removed by colonoscopy,** a simple outpatient procedure. Finding and removing all colon polyps during a person's lifetime will prevent most, if not all, colon cancers. Only *adenomatous* polyps lead to cancer. *Hyperplastic* polyps do not lead to cancer. It is important to talk with your doctor right away if you notice any of the following:

- *A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, narrowing of stools that lasts more than a few days*
- *The urge to have a bowel movement that is not relieved by doing so*
- *Rectal bleeding or blood in the stool*
- *Cramping or steady stomach pain*

■ WHO IS AT RISK FOR COLON CANCER?

There are a number of risk factors associated with colorectal cancer. While some risk factors are under your control, others are not. African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews have higher rates of colon cancer than Caucasians, Asians, or Pacific Islanders. American Indians, Hispanics and Alaskan Natives have the lowest rates of colorectal cancer. **The primary risk factor for colorectal cancer is age,** with over 90% of cases diagnosed in people over the age of 50. Other risk factors include:

- *Family history*
- *Smoking*
- *Alcohol consumption*
- *Obesity*
- *Physical inactivity*
- *A high-fat and/or low-fiber diet*
- *Inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables*

■ IS FAMILY HISTORY IMPORTANT?

Up to 30% of colon cancers are found in people who have a close relative with colon cancer or polyps. If a close relative (parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent, cousin, niece or nephew) has had colon cancer or polyps, you may need special screening tests for you and your relatives. If more than one family member had colon cancer/polyps, or if anyone had cancer under the age of 50, your risk is increased substantially. Some people with a family history of colon cancer or polyps need to begin colon tests at an age earlier than 50. **Be sure to discuss your family history with your doctor.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

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