



Colorectal Cancer Awareness

Colorectal cancer is a type of cancer that originates in the tissues of the colon or rectum. Depending on the exact location, the cancer may be referred to specifically as colon cancer or rectal cancer.

The colon and the rectum are both part of the large intestine. Most colorectal cancers begin as a growth, or polyp, on the inner lining of the large intestine. While polyps may remain benign, some can evolve into cancer over time. Polyps and early-stage colorectal cancer do not always cause symptoms.

Colorectal Cancer Symptoms

Many of the symptoms of colorectal cancer could also be signs of other common conditions that are not cancer. However, if you experience any of the following symptoms, regardless of your age, please consult your doctor, as colorectal cancer may not result in noticeable symptoms until it is advanced.

- Changes in bowel habits lasting longer than four weeks (including diarrhea, constipation or different stool consistency)
- Blood in stool
- A feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Frequent abdominal discomfort (including gas, bloating, cramps or pain)
- Weakness or fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss
- Nausea or vomiting

Risk Factors

There are a number of things that could increase a person's risk for developing colorectal polyps or cancer, such as certain lifestyle factors or family history.

Specific risk factors include:

- Family or personal history of colorectal polyps or cancer
- Inflammatory bowel disease (including Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis)
- Certain genetic syndromes (including familial adenomatous polyposis or Lynch syndrome)
- Inactive lifestyle
- Obesity
- Low-fiber, high-fat diet (including diets low in fruits/vegetables or high in processed meats)
- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol use
- Type 2 diabetes
- Certain racial/ethnic backgrounds (including African Americans or Ashkenazi Jews)



Colorectal Cancer

Screening Guidelines

In recent years, colorectal cancer diagnoses have become more common in younger populations. The American Cancer Society recommends that people at average risk begin regular screening for colorectal cancer at age 45. If you are thought to be at a higher risk, you may need to start getting screened earlier. It is important to discuss this with your healthcare team to ensure you are being screened at the appropriate intervals for your personal risk level.

There are several different types of tests that may be used to screen for colorectal cancer, including colonoscopies and stool tests. Your doctor can help you determine which type of testing may be right for you.

If you or someone in your family need more information about colorectal cancer prevention, screening or treatment or help finding a specialist, contact a Medical Ally for one-on-one, personalized support.

References:

Colorectal Cancer, American Cancer Society, February 2018.

Colorectal Cancer, National Cancer Institute, March 2018.

Colorectal Cancer, MedlinePlus.gov, 2019.

Risk Factors & Symptoms: Colorectal Cancer Screening Saves Lives, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2017.



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