

Colorectal Cancer Fast Facts

What is it?

Cancer of the colon and/or rectum is commonly referred to as colorectal cancer.

How common is it?

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in American men and women combined, ranking just behind lung cancer.



What age groups are most at risk?

It used to be considered rare for a person under age 20 to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer, but that's changing. Rates for people under 55 are on the rise, while the rates for people over 55 have been declining slightly. For this reason, some medical organizations are in the process of lowering the recommended age for baseline testing from 50 to 45. African Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates: 40% higher than the rest of the population.

What are the symptoms?

Colorectal cancer may have few if any symptoms in the early stages. Talk with your doctor if you experience:

- A change in bowel habits
- Persistent abdominal discomfort
- Persistent weakness, fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

How is it detected?

A variety of screening tests can detect colorectal cancer in its earliest – and most treatable – stages. Talk with your doctor about which screening tests are appropriate based on your personal risk factors.

Is it treatable?

It can be, especially when discovered early. Even if it spreads into nearby lymph nodes, surgical treatment followed by chemotherapy is very effective. In the most advanced cases – when the cancer has spread to the liver, lungs or other sites – treatment can often make surgery an option, and can prolong and add to quality of life.

Is it preventable?

Regular colorectal cancer screening is one of the most powerful tools for preventing colorectal cancer. Additionally, you may be able to lower your risk of colorectal cancer via lifestyle changes:

- Increase the amount and intensity of your physical exercise
- Limit red and processed meats
- Enjoy more vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Quit smoking

