

# COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS

## COLORECTAL CANCER

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon and/or rectum. It occurs when a polyp (a growth) in the lining of the colon or rectum becomes cancerous. The colon and rectum, known as the large intestine, is a long, thick tube that takes in water and minerals from digested food and stores undigested solid waste.

In 2018, the American Cancer Society estimates there will be about 97,000 new cases of colon cancer and about 43,000 new cases of rectal cancer in the United States. While men and women have the same lifetime risk, men are at higher risk than women at any given age. Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States and is expected to cause about 50,000 deaths in 2018.

Colorectal cancer typically starts out with no symptoms. Over time, a number of warning signs can occur, such as: rectal bleeding, blood in your stool (bright red or black), changes in the shape of the stool (e.g., thin like a pencil), pain in having a bowel movement, frequent cramping pain in your lower belly, frequent gas pains, or weight loss without dieting. If you are having any of the above symptoms, call your physician right away.

## Routine Screenings

With routine colorectal cancer screening, more than one-third of colorectal cancer deaths can be avoided. Finding and removing colon polyps prevents colon cancer, no matter your risk level. Screening usually begins at age 50, but can start earlier if you're at a higher risk.

Screening tests include:

- A colonoscopy, which involves looking at the colon from inside the body. If the doctor detects polyps, these are removed during the procedure. Removing polyps during a colonoscopy can stop colon cancer from growing and, in some instances, cure cancer.
- A Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT), which includes collecting stool samples at home.



This test can find hidden, invisible blood in the stool and can detect cancer early.

- A Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), which includes collecting stool samples at home and can find blood in your stool. It is designed to detect cancer early, but it does not find precancerous polyps.

## PREVENTING COLORECTAL CANCER

Healthy life choices are the best way to lower your risk of colorectal cancer. Here's how you can help lower your risk:

- Quit smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Increase your physical activity.
- Limit red (beef, pork and lamb) and processed meats (hot dogs, sausage, and lunch meats)
- Eat more vegetables especially cruciferous (such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts)
- Eat more fruits and whole grains.
- Avoid excess alcohol



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For support from a registered nurse or registered dietitian or to ask questions, please call a Blues On Call<sup>SM</sup> health coach at **1-888-BLUE-428**.

Log in to the member website listed on the back of your member ID card.

- Click on the **Wellness** tab.
- Click on **Additional Resources** on the left.
- Click on **Health Topics** under **WebMD health information** to search health topics or use the medical encyclopedia to review health issues you want to know more about.