



# COLON CANCER

Know the basics. Get screened.



Cancer is a group of diseases in which cells in the body grow out of control. One of the most common types of cancer is colorectal cancer. It is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.<sup>1</sup> So it's critical to understand the signs and symptoms of this disease and to get your screenings.

## ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER

Colorectal cancer is a cancer of the large intestine, which includes the colon and the rectum. Most cases begin as small clumps of noncancerous cells called polyps. Over time, some polyps may become colon cancer.

## RISK FACTORS

Colorectal cancer can affect men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, though the risk rises after age 50.<sup>2</sup> Here are some factors that may increase your risk of colorectal cancer.<sup>2,3</sup>

- › Personal history of colorectal polyps
- › Family history of colon cancer
- › Lack of regular physical activity
- › Low-fiber, high-fat diet
- › Obesity
- › Alcohol or tobacco use
- › Inflammatory bowel disease, such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease

## SYMPTOMS

Colorectal polyps and cancer don't always cause symptoms, especially at first. You could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it. That is why getting screened regularly is so important. If you do have symptoms, they may include the following.<sup>3,4</sup>

- › Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement)
- › Pains, aches or cramps in your stomach that don't go away
- › Unexplained weight loss
- › Change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea or constipation
- › Fatigue



## SCREENINGS

Screenings can find precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) so that they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screenings can also help find colorectal cancer at an early stage, when treatment may cure it.<sup>5</sup>

## TYPES OF TESTS

There are several ways to screen for colon cancer. Talk with your doctor about which test is right for you.<sup>6</sup>

### › Stool test

This test checks for blood in your stool.

### › Sigmoidoscopy

A small, flexible scope is used to view only the lower part of your colon. A sigmoidoscopy and a stool test are sometimes used together.

### › Colonoscopy

It's similar to a sigmoidoscopy, but your doctor can see your entire colon. It is the most thorough test.

Your doctor can also take tissue samples (biopsies) for analysis and remove polyps during a colonoscopy.

You will need to cleanse your bowel both the day before and the day of your colonoscopy. Medicine will be given during your colonoscopy to make you sleepy and relaxed.

### › CT colonography (Virtual colonoscopy)

This test uses X-rays and computers to produce images of your entire colon.

## PRIMARY TREATMENT OPTIONS

The type of treatment your doctor recommends will depend largely on the stage of your cancer.

- › Surgery
- › Chemotherapy
- › Radiation



Start talking with your doctor about screening at age 45, or sooner if you have an increased risk for colon cancer. Your doctor can recommend when to start, which test is best for you and how often you should be tested.

## IMPORTANT WAYS TO LOWER YOUR RISK<sup>7</sup>



Get your recommended screenings



Eat a healthy diet



Increase your physical activity



Limit alcohol consumption



Avoid tobacco



1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Colorectal Cancer Statistics." Last reviewed June 6, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/statistics/index.htm>

2. CDC. "What Are the Risk Factors for Colorectal Cancer?" Last reviewed February 17, 2022. [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic\\_info/risk\\_factors.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/risk_factors.htm)

3. Mayo Clinic. "Colon cancer." October 8, 2022. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/colon-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20353669>

4. CDC. "What Are the Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?" Last reviewed February 17, 2022. [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic\\_info/symptoms.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/symptoms.htm)

5. CDC. "What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Colorectal Cancer?" Last reviewed February 17, 2022. [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic\\_info/prevention.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/prevention.htm)

6. Medline Plus. "Colon cancer screening." National Institutes of Health: National Library of Medicine. Last reviewed July 15, 2020. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002071.htm>

7. CDC. "What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Colorectal Cancer?" Last reviewed February 17, 2022. [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic\\_info/prevention.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/prevention.htm)

This is general health information and not medical advice or services. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing and health care recommendations.

All Cigna products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation, including Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Evernorth Behavioral Health, Inc., Cigna Health Management, Inc., and HMO or service company subsidiaries of Cigna Health Corporation. The Cigna name, logo, and other Cigna marks are owned by Cigna Intellectual Property, Inc. All pictures are used for illustrative purposes only.