Colorectal Cancer: Important Facts

In 2022, nearly 2 million people were diagnosed with colorectal cancer. It is common, and it is a top cause of cancer death. It affects both men and women and occurs in adults of all ages.

What is Colorectal Cancer?
Colorectal cancer, also known as colon cancer, is a type of cancer that affects the colon or rectum. The colon, which is the longest part of the large intestine, breaks down food for the body, and cancer can disrupt this process.

Catching It Early is Crucial
Early detection is key to reducing death rates and making treatment easier. Colorectal cancer often starts as a non-cancerous polyp that can be removed early to prevent cancer.
Colorectal Cancer Risk Factors

- Having a family member who had colon cancer
- A diet high in fat or processed meats and low in fruits and vegetables
- Not exercising
- Being overweight
- Smoking cigarettes
- Drinking a lot of alcohol
- Having certain bowel diseases like Crohn’s or ulcerative colitis
- Inherited conditions like Lynch syndrome or FAP

If you are at higher risk, talk to your doctor about possibly starting screening earlier.

Colorectal Cancer Symptoms

- Changes in bowel habits, such as constipation or diarrhea, or a change in the stool itself
- Rectal Bleeding
- Blood in or on the stool (bowel movement)
- Unintentional or unexplained weight loss
- Abdominal pain or bloating

If you have any of these symptoms, please talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider.

Screening Saves Lives

What Is Screening?
It is checking for cancer before you feel sick or have any symptoms.

When to Start Screening
Screening typically starts at age 50, but many places, including the US, now recommend beginning at age 45. If you have risk factors, talk to your doctor about whether you should start screening earlier.

Colonoscopy
A colonoscopy is a comprehensive test where doctors can see inside your colon and rectum. They can remove any polyps they find. Colonoscopy is often called the “gold standard” test for colorectal cancer because it is the only test that combines screening, diagnosis, and potential treatment of polyps in one procedure.

Other Screening Methods
Colorectal cancer screening is also done with
- stool testing (FIT, FOBT, stool DNA tests)
- imaging tests (barium enema, virtual colonoscopy).

All of these tests require a follow-up colonoscopy if an abnormal result is found.

Talk to your doctor about which screening test is best for you. Some tests may not be available in all areas.

For more information about colorectal cancer, screening, risk factors, and treatment, please visit globalcca.org