

March

Health Activities and Observances

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world. Indeed,
it is the only thing that ever has.*

-Margaret Mead



National Colorectal Cancer
Awareness Month
National Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
Awareness Month
National Eye Donor Month
National Kidney Month
National Nutrition Month
Hemophilia Awareness Month
Mental Retardation Awareness Month
Save Your Vision Month
National Poison Prevention Week (21-27)
National School Breakfast Week (8-12)
National Sleep Awareness Week (29-April 4)
American Diabetes Alert Day (23)

March

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Mon	1	_____	Mon	8	_____
Tue	2	_____	Tue	9	_____
Wed	3	_____	Wed	10	_____
Thu	4	_____	Thu	11	_____
Fri	5	_____	Fri	12	_____
Sat	6	_____	Sat	13	_____
Sun	7	_____	Sun	14	_____

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

March

Mon 15 _____ Mon 22 _____

Tue 16 _____ Tue 23 _____

Wed 17 _____ Wed 24 _____

Thu 18 _____ Thu 25 _____

Fri 19 _____ Fri 26 _____

Sat 20 _____ Sat 27 _____

Sun 21 _____ Sun 28 _____

March

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Mon 29 _____

Tue 30 _____

Wed 31 _____

NOTES _____



Wellness starts with... Colorectal Health



We rarely talk about our colorectal health with our family or friends. It can be an embarrassing topic, and many of us think colorectal cancer (cancer of the colon or rectum) mostly affects older men. But did you know that colorectal cancer affects an equal number of women and men each year? Excluding skin cancer, it is the third most diagnosed cancer for

women, following breast and lung cancers. And it is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Colorectal cancer is often called a “silent” disease because symptoms don’t always develop until it is difficult to cure. The good news is that colorectal cancer is preventable and mostly curable when detected early through regular screening tests.

Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

In the early stages of colorectal cancer, you may have no symptoms. Sometimes colorectal cancer does give you symptoms that may seem like other problems. **So it is important to check with a health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:**

- rectal bleeding or pain
- blood in or on the stool that is either bright red or very dark
- change in a regular bowel habit
- stools that are narrower than usual
- vomiting
- diarrhea, constipation, or feeling that the bowel does not completely empty
- frequent gas pains
- unexplained weight loss
- unexplained anemia
- new lower abdominal pains or general stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness and/or cramps, frequent gas pains)
- constant and extreme fatigue

Colorectal Disease

The Colon and Rectum

The colon and rectum are parts of the body’s digestive system, which remove nutrients from food and store waste until it passes out of the body. Together, the colon and rectum form a long, muscular tube called the large intestine (also called the large bowel). The colon is the first six feet of the large intestine, and the rectum is the last 8 to 10 inches. Cancer that begins in the colon is called *colon cancer*, and cancer that begins in the rectum is called *rectal cancer*. Cancers affecting either of these parts of the bowel may also be called *colorectal cancer*.

Colon Polyps

A polyp is extra tissue that grows inside your body. Colon polyps grow in the large intestine. Most polyps are not dangerous. Most are benign, which means they are *not* cancer. But over time, some types of polyps can turn into cancer. Usually, polyps that are smaller than a pea aren’t harmful and do not produce symptoms. But larger polyps could someday become cancer or may already be cancer. To be safe, doctors remove all polyps and test them.

Both small and large polyps can be found and removed during routine screening tests. You might need surgery if you have very large polyps. Once a polyp is removed, the same risk factors that may have caused the polyp in the first place are probably still present. So you should follow up with regular exams by doctors who are specially trained to treat diseases of the colon and rectum. If colorectal cancer is caught in the earliest stages, 80 to 90 percent of people will recover.

Who Is at Risk

The risk of colorectal cancer generally increases as you age. Most people (both women and men) older than age 50 are considered to have an average risk of developing the disease (about a 1 in 20 chance). **Others could be at a higher risk for serious colorectal cancer if they have:**

- a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps
- a personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease like Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- African American or Latina descent (who are often diagnosed at a later stage of the disease)
- a personal or family history of ovarian, endometrial, or breast cancer



Having one or more of these risk factors does not mean that you will develop colorectal cancer. It just increases the chances. It is important to know your family medical history and share it with your health care provider because colorectal cancer can be an inherited disease. Talk with your health care provider about your own risk and then decide when you should start colorectal cancer screening and which tests are best for you. Genetic tests are available for people whose family has a certain pattern of cancer.

Researchers think that other possible risk factors for colorectal cancer include:

- a diet low in fiber (low fruit and vegetable intake) and high in fat (although further research is needed to clarify the link between colorectal health and a fiber-rich diet)
- long-term exposure to environmental or occupational toxins (poisons)
- alcohol consumption
- smoking
- a lack of regular physical activity
- obesity

There is ongoing research to look at foods rich in folate (one of the B vitamins), like leafy green vegetables and fortified cereals, to help reduce your risk. Adding these foods to your diet or adding a daily multivitamin with 0.4 mg of folic acid may help. New research shows that some pain medications called COX-2 inhibitors may also help to prevent colon cancer. More research is under way to better understand this effect. Other studies are looking at smoking cessation, taking aspirin each day, decreased alcohol intake, and increased physical activity to see if these measures can help prevent colorectal cancer.

Preventive Screening Tests

Colorectal cancer is easy to treat and often curable when detected early. The most effective tool against this disease is screening. Many women fear that the screening tests are embarrassing or painful. But they're not as bad as you might imagine. They are relatively simple, not painful, and may only cause a brief period of discomfort. Make colorectal health screening as important as your mammogram or Pap test. If you have a strong



Steps You Can Take for Your Colorectal Health

- Adopt a low-fat, high-fiber diet (include a variety of vegetables, natural grains, and fruits).
- Consider taking calcium supplements and a daily multivitamin with 0.4 mg of folic acid. Also increase intake of foods with high levels of vitamins C, A, and D.
- Try to stay at a healthy weight. Ask your health care provider about a healthy weight range for you.
- Consume alcoholic beverages in moderation, if at all (no more than one to two drinks per day for women).
- Avoid salt-cured, pickled, and smoked foods.
- If you smoke, quit.
- Get regular exercise.
- Get screening tests for colorectal cancer, and encourage those you love to do the same. It could save your life or the life of someone you love!

family history of cancer, your health care provider might suggest screening tests more frequently and beginning at a younger age. *See the screening charts on pages 16-21 for more information.*

Recommended screening tests for all average-risk adults beginning at age 50 are:

- **A stool blood test every year, also called fecal occult blood test (FOBT).** This simple test for colon and rectal cancer is used to detect tiny amounts of hidden blood in the stool. A doctor can perform the test or you can take it in the privacy of your home and send it to a lab for results.

- **A flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years (with fecal occult blood test is preferred).** A doctor can perform this test in his or her office and can look directly at the rectum and lower one third of the colon. This is the area where most polyps and cancers develop.
- **A colonoscopy every 10 years.** This exam looks at the entire colon. It takes less than one hour and enables your doctor to see the entire lining of the colon and rectum. If polyps are found, they can be removed during this test. You will receive anesthesia during this test to reduce any discomfort. This test is often used for people with a family history of colon cancer.
- **A double contrast barium enema (DCBE) every 5 to 10 years (this test is only needed if you are not having colonoscopy every 10 years).** This test is an x-ray of the entire colon and rectum, requires an enema, and is performed in a hospital or clinic. This test allows the x-ray to show the intestine, but is not as accurate as a colonoscopy.
- **A rectal exam, or digital rectal exam (DRE) (during regular check-ups and with each screening sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, or DCBE).** With this exam, your health care provider will place a finger covered with a lubricated glove into the rectum to feel for abnormalities. It is quick and not painful and can detect many rectal cancers.

For more information on colorectal cancer, check out the following resources:

National Cancer Institute

Internet: www.cancer.gov
 Colon and rectal cancer information: <http://cancer.gov/cancerinfo/types/colon-and-rectal>
 Phone: 800-4-CANCER

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 Cancer Prevention and Control Program**

Internet: www.cdc.gov/cancer

American Cancer Society

Internet: www.cancer.org
 Phone: 800-ACS-2345

American College of Gastroenterology

Internet: www.acg.gi.org
 Phone: 703-820-7400

Publications

Colorectal Cancer: Let's Break the Silence
 Internet: www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife/pdf/CCSilencebrochure.pdf

What You Need to Know about Cancer of the Colon and Rectum

Internet: www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/wyntk/colon-and-rectum