

Wellness by the Month

COLORECTAL CANCER

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States but the good news is that it is one of the most curable if diagnosed early.

What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is a malignant tumor that develops in the cells lining the colon (intestine). The disease takes many years to develop. It begins when cells start to multiply out of control and the extra cells form a tumor. The tumor can either be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). Colorectal cancer can develop from certain benign growths that protrude from the mucous membrane of the intestine, called polyps.

What are the Risk Factors?

- Age – Colorectal cancer is more prevalent in people over 50 years.
- Race and Ethnicity – African American men and women develop colorectal cancer more often.
- Lifestyle – Eating a high fat, low fiber diet, being overweight, smoking and being inactive.
- Family history – If a parent or sibling has been diagnosed with colorectal cancer, your lifetime risk increases from two percent to six percent. If that relative was under age 45 your lifetime risk increases to 10 percent.
- Diseases of the colon – such as Crohn's and ulcerative colitis

What are the Symptoms?

- A change in bowel habits, such as persistent diarrhea, constipation or a decrease in the caliber (size-roundedness) of the stool
- Rectal bleeding or visible blood in the stool
- Persistent urge to move your bowels.
- Cramping or steady abdominal pain
- Decreased appetite
- Persistent weakness and fatigue

Early Detection Practices

The American Cancer Society recommends that beginning at age 50, both men and women at *average risk* for developing colorectal cancers should use one of the following screens: flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 yrs; colonoscopy every 10 years; double contrast barium enema every 5 years. Talk to your doctor about which test is best for you.

For more information visit the American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org