

Colorectal Cancer: *Just the Facts*



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), colorectal cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths in the United States for both men and women. Colon and rectal cancer have much in common and are often referred to as colorectal cancer. Most cases of the disease begin as non-cancerous polyps in the lining of the colon or rectum. Regular colorectal screenings can increase your chance of finding a polyp before it becomes cancerous.

Risk Factors for Colorectal Cancer

According to the CDC, the risk of developing colorectal cancer increases with age. Other risk factors include:

- a personal or family history of polyps
- inflammatory bowel disease
- a previous diagnosis of colorectal cancer

The CDC also lists the following lifestyle factors that may increase your risk for colorectal cancer:

- lack of regular physical activity
- low fruit and vegetable intake
- a diet low in fiber and high in fat
- overweight and obesity
- alcohol consumption
- tobacco use



Signs and Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

The American Cancer Society states colorectal cancer often develops without any symptoms. However, if you experience any of the following, call your doctor for an appointment:

- a change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea or constipation, which lasts more than a few days
- dark stools or blood in the stool
- stools that are more narrow than usual
- rectal bleeding
- feeling like you need to have a bowel movement that is not relieved by doing so
- cramping or abdominal pain
- weakness and fatigue
- unintended weight loss

Colorectal Cancer Prevention

Along with improved lifestyle habits, regular screenings are an important part of preventing colorectal cancer. Screenings can find colorectal cancer at an early stage, which greatly improves the chance for successful treatment and helps doctors find and remove polyps that might become cancerous. The CDC recommends colorectal cancer screenings begin at age 45 or earlier for people with high risk.* Ask your doctor which screening test is right for you and when you should begin screenings.

* For benefit coverage, visit TRICARE's Covered Services page at <http://www.tricare.mil/coveredservices>. Ask your doctor for age recommendations and risk guidelines.