

Colorectal cancer

Cancer of the colon and rectum - is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in American men and women. Colon cancer occurs in the large intestine. Most colorectal cancers begin as benign adenomas, or polyps. These growths spread very slowly, taking from 10 - 20 years to become cancerous. About 150,000 cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed every year in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. Most cases occur in people over 50. Although colorectal cancer is expected to be responsible for about 52,000 deaths a year, it is highly treatable if caught early.

Unfortunately, most people with colorectal cancer don't experience any symptoms in the early stage of the disease. That's why screening tests, such as a colonoscopy, are so important.

In general, signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer can include the following:

- Changes in bowel habits
- Blood in the stool (can have other causes, too)
- Problems related to blood loss (anemia, weakness, fatigue, shortness of breath, pounding or racing heart, chest pain, and intolerance to exercise)
- Abdominal discomfort (frequent gas, bloating, fullness, cramps, and pain)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain with bowel movement
- Feeling that your bowel doesn't empty completely

More than half of all colorectal cancers occur without any known cause. Studies also suggest that genetics may play a role. Some people with colorectal cancer carry specific genetic mutations or have relatives with the condition. Those with a family history of specific genetic syndromes are also at an increased risk for

developing colorectal cancer. Smoking and eating a high fat diet also raise the risk of developing cancer. Both genetics and lifestyle factors may play a strong role in determining which "at-risk" individuals develop the disease.

Risk Factors:

Risk factors for colorectal cancer include:

- Age (being over 50)
- Having colorectal cancer previously
- Having a history of adenomatous polyps
- Family history of colorectal cancer
- Eating a high-fat diet
- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Heavy use of alcohol
- Having inflammatory bowel disease (such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis)
- Having diabetes

Preventive Care:

Screening

Diet and Exercise

Treatment:

Surgery to remove the part of the colon containing tumor is the primary treatment. Depending on the stage of the cancer, surgery is generally followed with chemotherapy. If the tumor is particularly large, you may need radiation before or after surgery.

Some medications or supplements may help prevent the development of polyps or colorectal cancer. Making lifestyle changes, especially eating less red meat, losing weight, quitting smoking, and getting more exercise, may help prevent the disease -- even in people with a family history of the condition.

Lifestyle

Even if you have no family history of colorectal cancer, and unhealthy lifestyle can increase your risk of developing the disease.

A large, population-based study of men and women in Hawaii found that the following lifestyle factors were linked with colorectal cancer:

- Smoking
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- History of diabetes
- Frequent constipation
- High-calorie diet
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Low vegetable fiber intake (evidence here is mixed)
- High levels of insulin (hormone that controls blood sugar levels)
- Meat consumption

Medications

After surgery, chemotherapy (the use of anticancer drugs to destroy cancer cells) may be given to kill any cancerous cells that remain in the body. Chemotherapy controls the spread of the disease and improves survival rates over time. The following chemotherapeutic medications are often used alone or in combination to treat colorectal cancer:

Folfox, Camptosar, Bevacizumab (Avastin), Cetuximab (Erbix), Panitumumab (Vectibix) -- used when colorectal cancer has spread despite chemotherapy. Long-term use of aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are being investigated in the prevention and treatment of colorectal cancer. However, these drugs have risks of their own, including an increased risk of stomach bleeding. NSAIDs may also increase risk of heart problems.

Eloxatin(Oxaliplatin) is used for the treatment of early and metastatic colorectal cancer. In order to ensure access to cancer drug to all colorectal and other gastro-intestinal cancer patients in Bangladesh, sanofi-aventis introduced their Eloxatin patient assistance program at a local hotel in presence of renowned oncologists, cancer survivors, their friends and families. Under this program, the FDA approved chemotherapeutic agent Eloxatin (Oxaliplatin) will be made available at an affordable price (only 30% of its previous price) from January 03, 2011 to all cancer patients.

Surgery and Other Procedures

Surgery is the treatment of choice for colorectal cancer, and is best when the disease is found at an early stage.

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