

Just the Facts...Colorectal Cancer

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
MD ANDERSON
CANCER CENTER

Colorectal cancer occurs when cells in the colon or rectum grow and multiply uncontrollably, damaging surrounding tissue and interfering with the normal function of the colon or rectum. The cells can spread to other parts of the body. When the disease spreads, it is still called colorectal cancer.

Your best chance for surviving colorectal cancer is detecting it early. When found early, there is nearly a 90 percent chance for cure.

Symptoms

There often are no symptoms of colorectal cancer in its early stages. Most colorectal cancers begin as a polyp, a small, non-cancerous growth on the colon wall that can grow larger and become cancerous. As polyps grow, they can bleed or obstruct the intestine.

Symptoms include:

- rectal bleeding
- blood in the stool or toilet after a bowel movement
- prolonged diarrhea or constipation
- a change in the size or shape of your stool
- abdominal pain or a cramping pain in your lower stomach
- a feeling of discomfort or urge to have a bowel movement when there is no need

Having any of these symptoms does not mean that you have cancer, but if you notice one or more of them for more than two weeks, see your doctor.



Dr. Grace Butler, a former professor of higher education and colon cancer survivor, founded HOPE Through GRACE, Inc. She's a cancer advocate who teaches people the importance of prevention and screening.

Risk Factors

Many factors may influence the development of colorectal cancer, including:

- **age** Colorectal cancer is most common in people over 50.
- **family history** Your risk is higher with a family history (especially parent, sibling) of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps.
- **personal history** Your risk is higher with a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or colitis), colon cancer, or adenomatous polyps.
- **weight** Lack of physical activity and obesity are risk factors.
- **diet** A high-fat diet, particularly animal fats, may increase your risk. Diets high in fruits and vegetables are thought to decrease your risk.
- **cigarette smoking and alcohol** Your risk may be higher if you smoke or drink alcohol.

The Best of Colorectal Health

Screening

Cancer screening exams are medical tests that are performed when a person has no symptoms. Beginning at age 50, men and women should follow ONE of the five examination schedules below. All positive tests (FOBT, FIT, flexible sigmoidoscopy, barium enema) should be followed up with colonoscopy.

- Colonoscopy every 10 years (preferred by M. D. Anderson)
- Fecal occult blood test (FOBT - take-home multiple sample should be used) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT - take-home test) every year
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- Annual FOBT or FIT and flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years. Having both of these tests is recommended over either test alone.
- Double-contrast barium enema every five years

People at moderate or high risk for colorectal cancer (e.g. strong family history) should talk with their doctor about the need for a different testing schedule. To schedule an appointment for a screening colonoscopy, call 713-794-5073.

These screening recommendations are provided as a guide. If results of these exams suggest cancer, more extensive diagnostic tests of the colon or rectum should be conducted. More frequent exams are needed if polyps (precancerous lesions) are found. In individuals at increased risk with a family history of colorectal cancer or polyps or a personal history of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease, screening may need to begin earlier.

Reducing Your Risk

You can take action to reduce your risk of developing colorectal cancer. M. D. Anderson suggests:

- eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- limiting your fat intake to no more than 30 percent of your total daily calories
- exercising regularly
- maintaining your ideal weight
- quitting smoking
- limiting alcohol consumption

Take the time to discuss your own risks with your health care provider who can best advise you on the screening exams and risk-reduction strategies that are right for you.

Want to learn how you can prevent cancer?

Get a personalized action plan by completing M. D. Anderson's Risk Check at www.mdanderson.org/prevention.

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Frank Olivo is a 10-year colon cancer survivor, and when he's not at work preparing food for a local restaurant, he volunteers his time visiting with newly diagnosed colon cancer patients. A self-taught mechanic, he's pictured here rebuilding his car engine.

M. D. Anderson Resources:

M. D. Anderson's Cancer Prevention Center offers thorough cancer screening examinations that include cancer risk assessment, screening exams based on age and gender, as well as personalized risk-reduction strategies. Prevention programs include genetic testing, chemoprevention and nutritional counseling. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 713-745-8040 or 1-800-438-6434.

M. D. Anderson also offers colonoscopies to screen for colorectal cancer. To schedule an appointment, call 713-794-5073.

Other M. D. Anderson resources are available to the public, including patient support services, educational programs, guided tours, a learning center and wellness programs. You don't have to be an M. D. Anderson patient to use many of these services.

For more information about M. D. Anderson programs, services or referral, contact *askMDAnderson* at 1-877-MDA-6789 or www.mdanderson.org/ask.

