

colorectal cancer

protect yourself: know the facts

What is colorectal cancer?

The colon and rectum are parts of the digestive system. Colorectal cancer begins when cells that are not normal grow inside the colon or rectum. The cancer often begins as a small growth called a polyp. Polyps are not cancer, but they can turn into cancer over time. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Kentucky.

What are the symptoms?

There usually are no symptoms of the disease at first. When colorectal cancer is more advanced, common symptoms include:

- Blood in the stool
- A change in bowel habits
- Cramps
- Weight loss
- A tired feeling
- Nausea

What is screening?

Screening means looking for signs of disease before symptoms appear. There

are several tests that check for signs of colorectal cancer. They may be used alone or together. The tests may be uncomfortable but they could save your life. Two common tests are:

- Fecal occult blood test: You can do this test at home with a kit your health care provider will give you. This test checks for blood in the stool.
- Colonoscopy: The doctor inserts a thin lighted tube into the rectum and colon to check for polyps or cancer while the patient is under anesthesia.

Why is cancer screening important?

Screening saves lives. Colorectal cancer screening is important because there usually are no symptoms at first. A colonoscopy can find cancer early, when it is easiest to treat. It also can find polyps and other growths that are not normal. Removing these growths can stop colorectal cancer from developing.

Who should be screened?

People age 50 or older should be screened regularly. The chance of getting colorectal



cancer increases with age. More than 90 percent of people who get colorectal cancer are age 50 or older. Younger people with other risk factors should talk to their doctor about when and how often to be screened.

What are some other risk factors?

Your chance of getting the disease increases if you have a close relative who has had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer, or if you have inflammatory bowel disease.

Will my insurance cover the tests?

Most insurance plans cover colorectal screening tests for people age 50 or older. Medicare covers colorectal cancer screening for people 65 or older.

How can I reduce my chance of getting colorectal cancer?

- Talk with your doctor about which screening test is right for you and how often to be screened. At least one third of colorectal cancer deaths could be prevented if everyone age 50 and older got screened regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet. Avoid high-fat foods, limit red meat and processed meat, and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Exercise for 30-45 minutes at least five days a week.

- Stay at a healthy weight.
- If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink a day.

Where can I get more information?

For information about cancer resources in your community, call the Kentucky Cancer Program at **(859) 219-0772**.

For information on all types of cancer, call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service at **1-800-4-CANCER** or go to **www.cancer.gov**, or call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-ACS-2345** or go to **www.cancer.org**.

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