# colon cancer
## protect yourself: know the facts

## What is colon cancer?

The colon and rectum are parts of the digestive system. Colon 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. Colon cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer deaths in Kentucky.

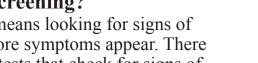## What are the symptoms?

**There usually are no symptoms of colon cancer at first.** When the disease is more advanced, symptoms may include blood in the stool, a change in bowel habits, cramps, weight loss, a tired feeling, and nausea. These symptoms can be caused by other health conditions. People with these symptoms should see their doctor.

## What is screening?

Screening means looking for signs of disease before symptoms appear. There are several tests that check for signs of colon cancer. Two common tests are:

Fecal Immunochemical Test: You can do this test *every year* at home with a kit from your health care provider. 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.** Colon cancer screening is important because there usually are no symptoms at first. A colonoscopy or annual FIT test can find cancer early, when it is easiest to treat. Colonoscopy can also find polyps and other growths that are not normal. Removing these growths can stop colon cancer from developing.

## Who should be screened?

**People age 50 or older should be screened regularly.** The chance of getting colon cancer increases with age. More than 90 percent of people who get colon 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 or a close relative has had colon polyps or colon cancer
- you have inflammatory bowel disease or certain hereditary conditions.

## What if I can't afford the tests?

Most insurance plans cover colon cancer screening tests for people age 50 and older. Medicare covers colon cancer screening for people 65 or older. For more detailed information, view the ACA and Cancer Fact Sheet available at www.kycancerc.org. Free colon cancer screening services are available to those who qualify. Call the Kentucky Colon Cancer Screening Program at (800) 633-8100 for details. Also, KCP's **Pathfinder**, an online, searchable guide, may help you find financial assistance available in your community. Visit www.kycancerprogram.org and click on the Pathfinder link.

## How can I reduce my chance of getting colon cancer?

- **Talk with your doctor about which screening test is right for you and how often to be screened.** At least 60% of colon cancer deaths could be prevented if everyone age 50 and older got screened regularly.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Limit high-fat foods, red meat, and processed meat.
- Exercise and stay at a healthy

weight.
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than 2 drinks per day for men, and 1 drink per day for women.

## Where can I get more information?

KCP's online tool, **Pathfinder**, can link you to cancer support and services nearest you. Visit **www. kycancerprogram.org** for cancer resources in your community. You may also contact your local **Kentucky Cancer Program** office.

For information on all types of cancer, contact:

- **National Cancer Institute, 1-800-4-CANCER, www.cancer.gov**
- **American Cancer Society, 1-800-ACS-2345, www.cancer.org**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov**

*This fact sheet was developed by the Kentucky Cancer Program at the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center. The information comes from the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

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