



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal Cancer is a cancer in the colon or rectum. Learning about Colorectal Cancer will be easier if you understand the following words:

- Intestine – also called bowel
- Gut – another name for the intestine
- Small intestine – also called the small bowel
- Large intestine – also called the large bowel
- Colon – the first 5 to 6 feet of the large intestine
- Rectum – the last 8 to 10 inches of the large intestine

The intestine is a long, muscular tube. It is coiled around in the belly (abdomen). It has several parts and is connected to the stomach. Food moves from the stomach into the small intestine. The small intestine is very long and narrow.

The large intestine comes next. It is wider and much shorter. The colon makes up the first five feet of the large intestine. The rectum is the last eight to ten inches of the large intestine. The rectum is where solid waste leaves the body. Colorectal Cancer is a cancer in the colon or rectum.

Most colorectal cancers start as polyps. A polyp is a small bumpy growth. Polyps can occur several places in the body. **Not all polyps turn into cancer.** Doctors remove polyps and test them for cancer.

Colorectal Cancer is the third most common kind of cancer in the U.S. The chances of being cured are very good if you:

- Know the signs of colorectal cancer
- Get tested

- Get treated if cancer is found

Signs of Colorectal Cancer

Solid body waste is pushed out of the body by a bowel movement (BM). This waste is called stool or feces.

Some signs of Colorectal Cancer are related to bowel movements, including:

- Blood in the stool
- Bleeding from the rectum after a bowel movement
- A change in bowel movements that last more than a week, such as loose or watery stools (diarrhea) or inability to have a bowel movement (constipation)

Other signs of Colorectal Cancer:

- Feeling full of gas (bloating)
- Gas pains in the belly
- Weight loss for no known reason
- Always feeling tired
- Vomiting

See your doctor and get tested if you have any of these signs of Colorectal Cancer.

What are the tests for Colorectal Cancer?

There are several tests for colorectal cancer. People over age 50 should have one or more of these tests on a regular basis.

- **Test for blood in the stool:** A small sample of stool is sent to a lab. The sample is checked for blood which cannot be seen. **This should be done every year.**
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** For this test, the doctor inserts a thin, soft tube into the rectum. It has a light on the end of it. This lets the doctor see the lower third of the colon. This test usually takes a few minutes. **This should be done every five years.**
- **Barium Enema:** This test gives a clear view of the inner surface of the colon. This is how the test is done:
 - Empty your bowel using a laxative or enema.

- A small tube is inserted into the rectum.
 - A liquid with barium in it is passed through the tube into the colon.
 - The barium is then drained out of the colon, leaving a thin film of barium on the walls of the colon.
 - The colon is filled with air and an X-ray is taken. Polyps, cancer or any other problems in the colon show up on the X-ray. **This should be done every five years.**
- **Colonoscopy:** This test is similar to the **Sigmoidoscopy test**. But in this test, the tube is attached to a camera and a screen. The doctor can see the entire colon on the screen. **This should be done every 10 years.**

If you are at risk for Colorectal Cancer, your doctor may ask you to have these tests more often.

Who is most at risk for colorectal cancer?

- People age 65 or older
- Men
- African Americans

You are also at risk if you:

- Have already had polyps removed
- Have a close family member with polyps or Colorectal Cancer
- Have had a long-term bowel disease

How can I reduce the risk of getting Colorectal Cancer?

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a low fat, high fiber, high calcium diet

Stay away from fatty meats and other animal fats, such as butter. Eat a diet high in fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods. Low-fat milk, low-fat cheese and yogurt should also be part of your diet.

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in the treatment of Colorectal Cancer and other bowel problems. To contact one of our doctors, please call:

Physician Referral Line at 1.800.223.8662

Visit our website at www.stvincentcharity.com

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 East 22nd Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216.861.6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1.800.750.0750

HealthCare Center at Saint Luke's Pointe

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216.721.6900

Reading Health, a program of Project: LEARN, assisted in the writing of this material under a grant from the Sisters of Charity Foundation: February 2008.



**ST. VINCENT CHARITY
MEDICAL CENTER**

A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System

