

# Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the colon or rectum. The colon and the rectum are parts of the large intestine, which is the lower part of the body's digestive system. During digestion, food moves through the stomach and small intestine into the colon. The colon absorbs water and nutrients from the food and stores waste matter (stool). Stool moves from the colon into the rectum before it leaves the body.

Most colorectal cancers are adenocarcinomas (cancers that begin in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids). Colorectal cancer often begins as a growth called a polyp, which may form on the inner wall of the colon or rectum. Some polyps become cancer over time. Finding and removing polyps can prevent colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in men and women in the United States. Deaths from colorectal cancer have decreased with the use of colonoscopies and fecal occult blood tests, which check for blood in the stool.

Tests are used to screen for different types of cancer. Studies show that screening for colorectal cancer helps decrease the number of deaths from the disease.

Four tests are used to screen for colorectal cancer:

- Fecal occult blood test
- Sigmoidoscopy
- Barium enema
- Colonoscopy

Studies have not shown that screening for colorectal cancer using digital rectal exam helps decrease the number of deaths from the disease.

New screening tests are being studied in clinical trials.

- Virtual colonoscopy
- DNA stool test

