

March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and a good time to learn more about colorectal cancer and how it can be prevented or best treated.

Approximately 130,000 new cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed every year and another 56,000 people die annually of this disease. According to the American Cancer Society, colon cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States when men and women are considered separately, and the second leading cause when both sexes are combined. The death rate from colon and rectal cancer has been dropping for the last 15 years, primarily based on early detection.

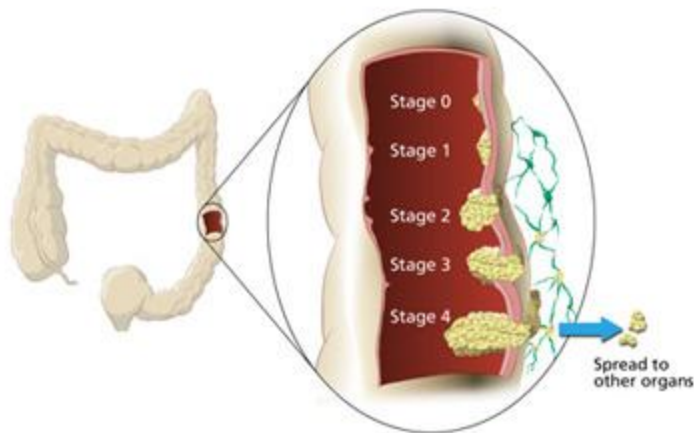
Colon cancer can be prevented by removing polyps from the colon with the colonoscope. The polyps, are mushroom like growths found in the colon of some patients and have a propensity to turn in to cancer or may already be harboring cancer or precancer. The risk of developing cancer can also be reduced with a diet low in fat and high in fruits and vegetables and regular exercises.

Prevention techniques include undergoing regular screening colonoscopies. Colon cancer can be prevented if polyps that turn into cancer are removed during a colonoscopy. Up to ninety percent of colon and rectal cancers detected in the early stages can be cured. But the cure rate drops to 50 percent or less when diagnosed in the later stages.

Studies have shown that patients treated by colorectal surgeons specialized in the treatment of colorectal cancer have better survival rates and experience fewer complications.

There are four stages of colon cancer. If the cancer is restricted to the inner lining of the colon it is stage I. If is involving the outermost layer of the wall or has spread through the wall without involving the nearby organs, it is stage II. When the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes or to distant organs it is stage III and IV respectively. Surgery is the main stay of treatment for the early stages of colon cancer and additional chemotherapy is needed for stage III colon cancer. Some early stage IV cancers are treated surgically with a curative intent. Surgery may be performed in patients with stage IV disease for palliation of symptoms.

Unlike colon cancers, rectal cancers are treated with surgery in conjunction with radiation and chemotherapy for stage II and stage III disease.



Six Steps to Lower the Risk of Colon and Rectal Cancer

1. Get regular screening colonoscopies starting at age 50. If you have a personal or a family history of colon cancer or polyps, other cancers, inflammatory bowel disease, you may need an earlier screening.
2. Eat a diet consisting of 25-30 grams of fiber. Fiber rich foods include fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grain bread, cereals and nuts.
3. Eat a low fat diet.
4. Eat foods rich in folate such as green leafy vegetables.
5. Alcohol in conjunction with smoking increases the risk of colon and other cancers. If you consume alcohol do so in moderation and quit smoking
6. Exercise for twenty minutes three to four times a week.