

## March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month



### Quick Facts

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which cancer cells form in either the tissues of the colon (the longest part of the large intestine), or the rectum (the last several inches of the large intestine). The colon and rectum are parts of the body's digestive system, which removes and processes nutrients from foods and helps pass waste material out of the body. Together, colon and rectal cancer are referred to as colorectal cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, the 2009 estimates for colorectal cancer in the United States are:

- 106,100 new cases of colon cancer
- 40,870 new cases of rectal cancer
- 49,920 deaths from colorectal cancer
- Both men and women are at risk
- Of cancers affecting both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the United States.
- Screening saves lives and can find precancerous polyps so they can be removed before they turn into cancer

### Symptoms

A common symptom of colorectal cancer is a change in bowel habits. Symptoms include:

- Having diarrhea or constipation
- Feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Finding blood (either bright red or very dark) in your stool
- Finding your stools are narrower than usual
- Frequently having gas pains or cramps, or feeling full or bloated
- Losing weight with no known reason
- Feeling very tired all the time
- Having nausea or vomiting

Polyps and early cancer may not cause pain or symptoms, so it is important to get regular screening. **Do not wait to feel pain before seeing a doctor.**

### Prevention

People over the age of 50 are at the highest risk for colorectal cancer. Other risk factors may include:

- Growths (called polyps) inside the colon
- Family history of colorectal cancer
- Smoking
- Health conditions like ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- Being African-American

The Optima 2010 Clinical Guidelines strongly recommend that clinicians start screening men and women at age 50. If you are at greater risk, you may need to begin regular screening at an earlier age. Screening options for colorectal cancer include home fecal occult blood test (FOBT), flexible sigmoidoscopy, the combination of home FOBT and flexible sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, and double-contrast barium enema. The best time to get screened is before any symptoms appear.

### You can reduce your risks if you are

- physically active and exercise regularly,
- maintain a healthy weight,
- eat a high-fiber diet rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans and whole grains,
- consume calcium-rich foods like low-fat or skim milk,
- limit red meat consumption and avoid processed meats,
- avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

Remember that many cases of colorectal cancer can be prevented! For more information, call **1-800-SENTARA (736-8272)** or go to <http://www.sentara.com/services/cancer/colorectalcancer>.