

## What is colon cancer?

It is the growth of harmful cells in the rectum or large intestine (colon).

## What is a polyp?

- A polyp is a bump on the lining of the colon or rectum
- Left in place, some polyps may become a larger lump or cancer
- Colon cancer almost always starts with a polyp
- Early removal of a polyp stops the cancer before it starts (for both men and women)

## What are the signs of colon cancer?

- Early screening is very important. There are usually no symptoms at first
- The number of cases of colon cancer rises greatly from age 50 to 70

Later you may have:

- Bloody or black, tarry stools
- Cramps or a full feeling
- A change in bowel habits
- Weight loss for no reason
- Pain in your rectum
- Anemia (low blood count)
- Loss of bowel control

## You may be at higher risk for colon cancer and need screening earlier if:

- You are 50 or older
- You have Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease
- One of your parents, siblings or children have a history of colon or rectal cancer or polyps
- You smoke or use other tobacco products
- You are overweight
- You do not get regular physical exercise
- You are of African American or Ashkenazi Jewish heritage
- You often eat red meat



## How can I lower my risk of getting colon cancer?

- Ask relatives about your family's cancer and polyp history
- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week
- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily
- Avoid tobacco, limit alcohol and red meat
- Maintain a healthy weight

## How can I get screened for colon cancer?

Beginning at age 50, there are four tests:

- Fecal Occult Blood Testing at home (yearly)
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy - examines the lower part of your colon and rectum with a lighted scope (every five years)
- Double Contrast Barium Enema - injects air and dye into the bowel through the rectum (every five years)
- Colonoscopy - looks at the entire colon and rectum through a lighted scope (every 10 years)

It is important to discuss these options with your provider to help choose the test that is most appropriate for you.

Ninety percent of patients whose colon cancer is found and treated early survive more than five years after the cancer is found.



*Colon cancer screening saves lives!*



