

ASCO ANSWERS

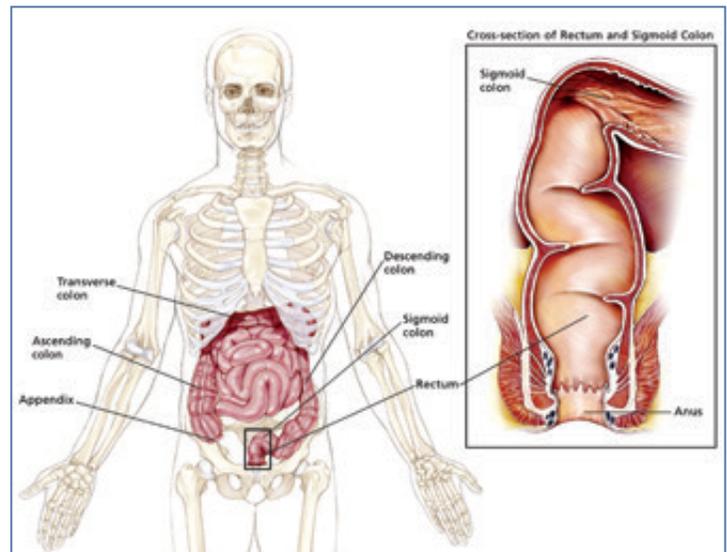
COLORECTAL CANCER

WHAT IS COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which normal cells in the lining of the colon or rectum change and grow uncontrollably. This cell growth can form a noncancerous polyp that can become a cancerous tumor over time. Most colon and rectal cancers are a type of tumor called adenocarcinoma. Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer diagnosed in men and women in the United States.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE COLON AND RECTUM?

The colon and rectum make up the large intestine, which plays an important role in the body's ability to process waste. The large intestine turns food digested by the stomach and small intestine into fecal waste (stool) that leaves the body through the anus.



Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are five stages for colorectal cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Descriptions and illustrations of these stages are available at www.cancer.net/colorectal.

HOW IS COLORECTAL CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of colorectal cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Typically, surgery to remove the tumor is the first treatment. Additional treatment may be given to lower the risk of the cancer returning and/or treat cancer that has spread. This may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy (treatment that targets the cancer's specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth), and surgery to remove metastases (cancer that has spread past the colon and rectum). When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of colorectal cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team; this is called supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH COLORECTAL CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your health care team:

- What type of colon or rectal cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the colon or rectal cancer? What does this mean?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do? Do they have experience treating colorectal cancer?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with this concern?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/colorectal.

Cancer.Net[®] 

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO[®]

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Adenoma:

A specific type of polyp that is likely to become cancerous

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Colonoscopy:

A test that allows doctors to look inside the colon and rectum for polyps or cancer using a colonoscope (lighted tube)

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Polyp:

A growth in the colon or rectum that is a risk factor for colorectal cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue