



Patient Counseling Report

➤ COLORECTAL CANCER

WHAT IS COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer refers to cancer of the colon or rectum. The colon and the rectum are part of the large intestine, which is part of the digestive tract. The majority of colorectal cancers begin as a polyp, which is a non-cancerous growth of tissue, in the colon or rectum. Colon and rectum cancers develop slowly over a period of several years. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. The number of new cases and the number of deaths have been decreasing over the past several years due to early detection from screening.

HOW IS COLORECTAL CANCER DETECTED?

Colorectal cancer can often be identified early during a screening procedure called a colonoscopy. If found early, the chance of successful treatment is greatly improved. Screening tests can also help prevent some cancers by allowing doctors to find and remove polyps that may progress to cancer.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COLORECTAL CANCER?

Individuals with colorectal cancer may experience:

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Blood in the stool
- Abdominal cramping or pain
- Fatigue
- Weight loss

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH COLORECTAL CANCER?

Although the cause of colorectal cancer is unknown, it can sometimes be associated with known risk factors. The following factors increase the risk of developing colorectal cancer:

- Age over 50
- Lack of exercise
- Diets high in fat and calories and low in fiber
- Smoking and alcohol abuse
- Obesity
- Conditions such as ulcerative colitis, an inflammatory disease of the colon, and polyps
- Family history of polyps and colorectal cancer
- Individuals who have one or more of these risk factors may need to be screened earlier and more frequently.

WHAT TREATMENT OPTIONS DO I HAVE?

The treatment and the outlook for recovery depend on the stage of the cancer. It is important to quickly and effectively evaluate the extent of the colorectal cancer. Your doctor will recommend any additional testing that he/she feels is needed to evaluate the cancer prior to treatment. The main treatments for colorectal cancer are surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. A team of doctors will determine the appropriate treatment for you.

Surgery: Removal of the cancer by surgery is the most common form of treatment for colon cancer of all stages. During surgery the cancerous tissue is removed as well as a smaller section of healthy tissue surrounding it. The two ends of the colon are then sewn back together. Often times the lymph nodes around the cancerous area will also be removed to determine if the cancer has spread. Sometimes chemotherapy or radiation therapy are used after surgery to kill any cancer cells that are left.

Chemotherapy: Chemotherapy is the use of drugs to kill the cancer cells or stop them from dividing. Most chemotherapy is given in the form of injections, however some can be taken orally. These drugs enter the bloodstream and travel throughout the entire body. The use of chemotherapy after surgery can increase the survival rate for patients with some stages of colorectal cancer and may help relieve symptoms of advanced cancer.

Radiation Therapy: Radiation therapy involves the use of high-energy rays to kill cancer cells. Radiation therapy is focused directly on the affected area and is sometimes given after surgery to kill any remaining cancer cells. If the cancer has attached to an internal organ or the lining of the abdomen, radiation therapy may be used to kill the cancer cells that are left behind after surgery.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I ASK MY DOCTOR?

Are there any other tests that we need to perform?
Where is my cancer located and has it spread?
What treatment do you suggest?
What are the benefits and risks of this type of treatment?
What are the chances of recurrence after my treatment plan?
How should I advise my family members regarding screening for colorectal cancer?

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

American Gastroenterological Association: www.gastro.org
American College of Gastroenterology: www.acg.gi.org
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy: www.asge.org
Colon Cancer Alliance: www.ccalliance.org
National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance: www.nccra.org