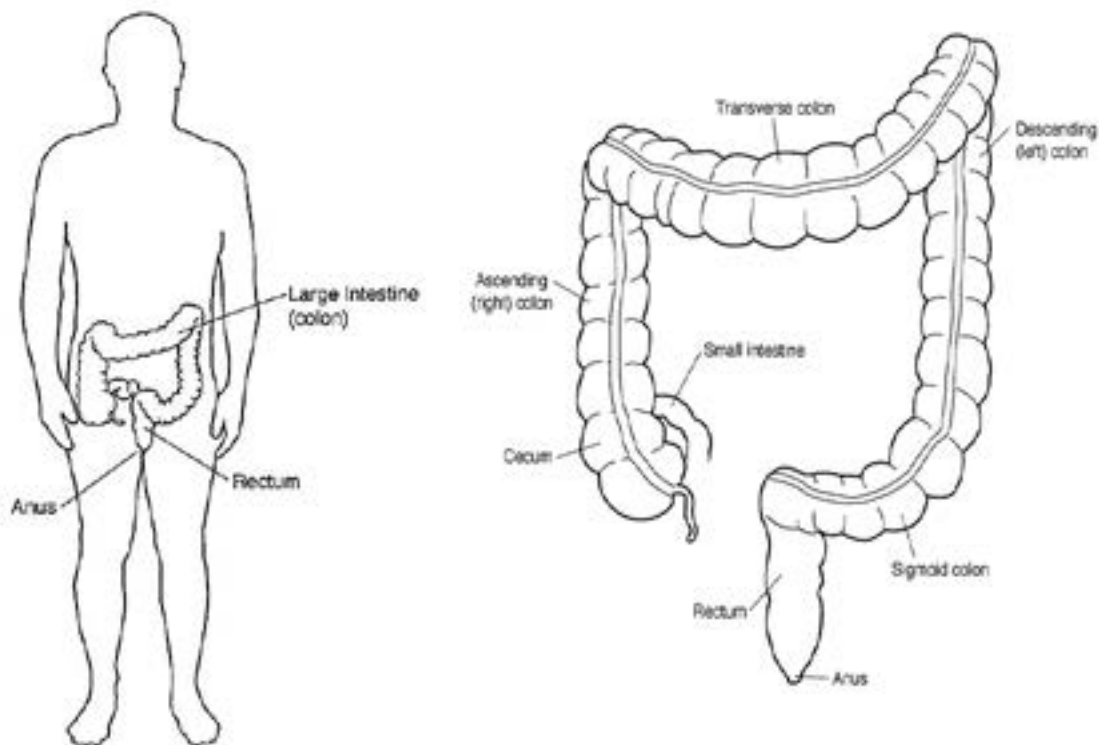


Cancer of the Colon and Rectum

The lower portion of your digestive system is the colon. It is also called the large bowel or large intestine. Your colon is the last 5 to 6 feet of the intestine. The last 8 to 10 inches of your colon is the rectum. After food is digested, solid wastes move through your colon and rectum to your anus, where they are passed out of your body.



Symptoms

Early colorectal cancer often has no symptoms. See your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Stools that are narrower than usual (pencil size)
- Bloating, fullness or cramps

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- Frequent gas pains
- Loss of weight for no reason
- Constant tiredness
- Blood in or on the stool (bright red or very dark red)
- Change in bowel habits

Types of Tumors

Tumors can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).

- **Benign** tumors do not spread to other parts of the body. They can be removed by surgery, if necessary.
- **Cysts** are benign tumors that contain fluid.
- **Malignant** tumors can grow into nearby tissues and organs, including blood.

Tests

If your doctor thinks there may be cancer, a complete exam will be done. This may include one or more of these tests:

- **A medical history:** The doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms and risk factors.
- **A physical exam:** This will include a rectal exam and an exam of the rest of your body. With a rectal exam, the doctor inserts a lubricated, gloved finger into your rectum and gently feels for any lumps.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** A thin tube with a light at the end is inserted into your rectum. This allows the doctor to see your sigmoid colon (lower part of your colon).
- **Colonoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a light at the end is used if the doctor wants to see the entire length of your colon.
- **Biopsy:** If an abnormal growth is found, your doctor will remove a small sample to look at.
- **Blood tests:** Your doctor will order a blood test to check to see if you have lost any blood. The blood test will also look to see how well your liver is working.
- If you have cancer, your doctor will check to see if the cancer has spread. This can be done with X-rays, CT scans and other types of blood tests (tumor markers).

Treatment

Your doctor will discuss the methods of treatment after all of your tests are done.

There are 3 ways to treat colon and/or rectal cancer: surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

- **Surgery**

The standard treatment for most colon and rectal cancer is surgery. The kind of operation done will depend on the location and size of your tumor.

- **Radiation Therapy**

Radiation therapy uses high energy rays to stop or slow the growth of cancer cells. It is mostly used after surgery to destroy any cancer cells that may remain. Radiation therapy is sometimes used to decrease the size of the existing tumor.

- **Chemotherapy**

The use of drugs to treat cancer is called chemotherapy. The various kinds of drugs are given by mouth, injection into a muscle or vein, or directly into the affected organ.

- **Immunotherapy**

Immunotherapy, sometimes called biotherapy, uses natural substances made by your body's immune system. These may kill the cancer cells, slow their growth, or help your immune system fight the cancer in a better way.