

# What You Need to Know About Colon Cancer



## How Is Colorectal Cancer Found?

You may have had tests to look for (screen) colorectal (KOH-loh-REK-tul) cancer. Two of these tests are called “sigmoidoscopy” and “colonoscopy.” In these, the doctor uses a scope (a small hollow tube) to look inside your rectum and colon. The doctor looks to make sure your colon is healthy and also looks for polyps or anything that doesn’t look normal. Usually the doctor can remove polyps and send them to the lab, where they will look for cancer.

## Colorectal Cancer Is Cancer of the Colon or Rectum

The colon and rectum form a long tube that absorbs water and cleans your body of waste.

In a sigmoidoscopy (sig-moid-AH-skuh-pee) or a colonoscopy (co-lun-AH-skuh-pee), your doctor looks at your rectum and colon with a lighted instrument.

Polyps (PAH-lips) are small balloon-shaped pouches in the colon or rectum that may contain cancer cells.

## What If the Doctor Tells Me I Have Cancer?

If cancer is found, your doctor will talk to you about the best treatment for you. That will depend on where the cancer has been found and if it has spread.

Your doctor will use one or more of these ways to treat your cancer:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy

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## Surgery

Surgery is the main form of treatment for cancer in the colon and rectum. During surgery for colon cancer, the parts of the colon that have cancer are cut out and the colon is sewn back together. For rectum cancer, sometimes part of the rectum that needs to be cut out is close to the anus, and sometimes the cancer is growing in organs close by. In these cases, the doctor needs to make an opening in the abdomen (AB-do-men) for stool to pass through it. This is called a colostomy (co-LOSS-tuh-me). For colon cancer, a colostomy is sometimes needed but in most cases can be closed up later.

## Radiation Therapy

In radiation therapy, cancer is killed or shrunk with high-energy rays. Radiation may be used as the main treatment for the cancer. It may also be used to shrink the area of cancer before you have surgery or to kill cancer cells after surgery.

## Chemotherapy (key-mo-THER-uh-pee)

In chemotherapy (often just called “chemo”), cancer is killed by strong drugs that you take by mouth or that get injected into a vein.

## What’s Next?

If you find out you have cancer, you will have a lot of questions. Don’t be afraid to ask your doctor all the questions you have about what treatment is best for you. Keep a notebook of what your doctor says so you can look at it when you are at home. Your doctor will also be able to tell you about support groups for people who have been diagnosed with cancer.