



# LOWER GI DISEASES

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## COLON CANCER

### LOWER YOUR RISKS

- Get regular colorectal cancer screening starting at age 50; age 45 for African American men
- Eat 25 to 30 grams of fiber daily from fruit, vegetables, nuts, beans, whole grain bread and cereals.
- Eat a **low-fat** diet.
- Eat foods with folate such as green, leafy vegetables.
- Drink alcohol in low moderation. Quit smoking.
- Exercise at least 20 minutes, 3-4 days a week.

### COLON FACTS

- Main function — absorption of water and minerals; formation and elimination of waste
- Contains 60 varieties of bacteria to aid in digestion, provide vital nutrient production, to maintain pH balance, and to prevent the spread of harmful bacteria

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in both men and women, and the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States; with an estimated 108,000 cases in 2007, 50,000 were males and 58,000 females.

There is no single cause for colon cancer. 95% of colon cancers begin as small, non-cancerous (benign) clumps of cells called adenomatous polyps. Over time, some of these polyps become colon cancers.

What you eat may play a role in your risk of colon cancer. Diets low in fiber and high in fat and calories may be associated with colon or rectal cancer.

Other risk factors include:

Crohn's disease, family history of colon cancer, personal history of breast cancer, ulcerative colitis and smoking. Obesity raises the risk of colon cancer in both men and women, but the link seems to be stronger in men.

The colon is one organ that indirectly and directly affects all the other organs in the body. When colon health is compromised, the liver can't do its job properly. When the liver can't work efficiently, the kidney suffers, etc.

Most cases of colon cancer have no symptoms. A few signs of colon cancer include:

- Changes in bowel habits
- Stomach cramps

- Blood in the stool
- Unexplained weight loss
- Unexplained anemia

Colon cancer is both curable and preventable if it is detected early and completely removed before the cancerous cells spread to other parts of the body. Colon cancer can almost always be caught in its earliest and most curable stages by a colonoscopy. Only a colonoscopy can see the entire colon.

Genetic testing using blood tests are now available to identify people with hereditary colon cancer syndromes. These syndromes are caused by specific inherited mutations that by themselves can cause colon cancers.

## ULCERATIVE COLITIS

Approximately half a million people in the United States have ulcerative colitis. Ulcerative colitis is a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). This chronic disease affects the colon or large intestine. The innermost lining of the intestine becomes inflamed and develops tiny open sores.

This causes the intestine to empty frequently.

The cause of ulcerative colitis is probably a combination of genetic and environmental factors. The immune system reacts inappropriately, and when turned on, it doesn't know when or how to shut off. This causes the inflam-

mation. Stress and certain foods can aggravate the symptoms in some people.

Currently there is no medical cure for ulcerative colitis. Treatment is aimed at controlling the inflammation and could be in the form of medication or surgery depending on the severity of symptoms.