UNDERSTANDING COLORECTAL CANCER:
Tips on Early Detection and Treatment

Colorectal cancer, also called colon cancer, is cancer that appears in the colon or rectum. It’s the second leading cancer killer in the U.S., affecting both men and women. Approximately 51,000 people die from colon cancer each year. However, if everyone 50 years old or older had regular preventive screenings, approximately 60% of the deaths could be avoided. Screenings can find polyps (abnormal growths) within the colon, so that they can be removed before they turn into cancer.

Who’s at Risk for Colorectal Cancer

- 1 in 21 men (4.7%)
- 1 in 23 women (4.4%)

Risk Factors That Can Be Changed*

- **Diet**
  High-fat, low-fiber diets with a lot of red meat and processed meat put you at a higher risk. Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains has been linked to a lower risk.

- **Weight**
  Being overweight raises the risk of colon cancer in both men and women, but the link seems to be stronger in men.

- **Exercise**
  Physical inactivity increases your chance of developing colorectal cancer. Be more active to help lower your risk.

*Additional factors include smoking and heavy alcohol use.
Early Detection, Effective Prevention

Pre-cancerous polyps and early stages of colorectal cancer don’t always cause signs or symptoms. A person could have polyps or colon cancer and not be aware of it, which is why preventive screening and early detection is so important. Talk to your doctor if you notice any of the following:5

- Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement)
- Pains, aches, or cramps in your stomach that are consistent and do not go away
- Unexplained weight loss

The American Cancer Society recommends that regular screening for colorectal cancer should start at age 50.6 Earlier or more frequent testing is recommended if you are at higher risk for developing colon cancer. What qualifies you at higher risk is if you or a close relative has had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer, or if you have inflammatory bowel disease, or have an inherited genetic syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer, or being of African American decent, or having Type 2 diabetes.

Consult with your doctor on when you should begin screening for colon cancer and how often you should be screened.

For more information on colorectal cancer, visit the following resources:

- American Cancer Society
  cancer.org/cancer/colonandrectumcancer

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal

- Mayo Clinic
  mayoclinic.org

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