



# NC COLORECTAL CANCER



## What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer refers to any cancer that starts in your colon or rectum (sometimes called intestines or bowels). Most colorectal cancers start as a growth, called a polyp, on the lining of colon or rectum and take a long time to grow. Not all polyps turn into cancer.



## Risk Factors

These risk factors may increase your chances for developing colorectal cancer.<sup>1</sup>

- **Age.** Colorectal cancer is linked to getting older.
- **Inflammatory bowel disease,** such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.
- **Family history of colorectal cancer or polyps.**
- **Lack of regular physical activity.**
- **A diet high in processed meats, low in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.**
- **Being overweight or obese.**
- **Excessive alcohol consumption.** No more than one drink per day for women and more than two drinks per day for men.
- **Tobacco use** (cigarette, cigars, pipe, e-cigarettes, vape pens and e-hookah).



## Symptoms

Most people do not have any symptoms of colorectal cancer until the cancer is advanced. Colorectal cancer symptoms may include:

- a change in bowel habits that last for more than a few days such as diarrhea, constipation or narrowing of the stool,
- blood in or on your stool,
- cramps or stomach pain that does not go away and/or
- unexplained weight loss.



## Colorectal Cancer in NC

Colorectal cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths in North Carolina in 2019 (1,622 deaths). It is estimated that 4,900 people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 1,744 people will die from colorectal cancer in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Colorectal cancer is preventable when screenings are done.



## Screening

The goal of screening is to detect colorectal cancer early before you have any symptoms. Colorectal screening can find polyps before they become cancer. There are two types of screening tools: stool-based tests and colonoscopy. Colorectal cancer screening should be begin at 45. People at higher risk due to family or personal medical history should consider periodic screening beginning at an earlier age and/or more frequent screening. If you have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps, talk with your healthcare provider.<sup>3</sup>

Talk to your healthcare provider about when to start and how often to get screened.

# You can reduce your Colorectal Cancer Risk!

- **Get a colorectal screening.** Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should start getting a colorectal screening.
- **Know your family health history including cancer illnesses and deaths.**
- **Eat Healthy.** Eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more water and fewer sugar-sweetened beverages and create meal plans to cook at home.
- **Be physically active.** Strive to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week and strength training at least twice a week.
- **Quit tobacco and vaping use.** Quitting takes practice! Coaching and medications can triple your chances of quitting for good. Call 1-800-Quit-Now or check out [www.QuitlineNC.com](http://www.QuitlineNC.com) for help.
- **Limit your alcohol consumption.** Alcohol should be limited to no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.



## Treatment

Treatment is most successful when cancer is detected early. Colorectal cancer treatment options include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. Depending on the stage of the cancer and other factors, different types of treatments may be combined for your type and stage of colorectal cancer. Your doctor can explain the risks and benefits of each treatment and their side effects.

## A cancer diagnosis is an Unexpected Journey.

Talk with your healthcare provider about a health care plan to help track your care and to support your physical and emotional health needs. Ask for a patient navigator. They will help guide you through your journey and connect you to resources and support services. Be your own advocate. Build your support circle. Continue to take steps to be healthy. These steps may help improve your quality of life and lower the risk of your cancer returning.

## Take Action!

Use My Health Action Plan to set monthly goals to make healthy lifestyle changes.

<https://publichealth.nc.gov/cccp/>

## Don't wait, start on your My Health Action Plan today!

Need help? Talk to your healthcare provider or visit the resources below.

NC DHHS, Cancer Prevention and Control Branch. <https://publichealth.nc.gov/cccp>

American Cancer Society. [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

Colorectal (Colon) Cancer – CDC. [www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/index.htm)

National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable (NCCRT). <https://nccrt.org>

North Carolina Society of Gastroenterology. [www.ncgisociety.org](http://www.ncgisociety.org)

Eat Smart/Move More NC. [www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com](http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com)



### References

1 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, What Are the Risk Factors for Colorectal Cancer? | CDC

2 - State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services, Central Cancer Registry. <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/cancer.cfm>

3 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, What Should I Know about screening? What Should I Know About Screening for Colorectal Cancer? | CDC



NC Department of Health and Human Services · Division of Public Health  
· Cancer Prevention & Control Branch · <https://publichealth.nc.gov> ·  
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