

## Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon and/or rectum. It is equally common in both men and women—153,760 cases were estimated to be diagnosed in 2007, with an estimated 52,180 deaths from the illness. It affects men and women equally. It is also one of the most easily prevented cancers because it can develop from polyps that can be removed before they become cancerous.

### PREVENTION

- Get regular screening tests.
- Exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Don't smoke, and don't drink alcohol excessively.

### RISK

- Men and women age 50 and older
- People with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or benign (not cancerous) colorectal polyps
- People with a personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease — ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- People with a family history of inherited colorectal cancer
- People who use tobacco, are obese and are sedentary

### SYMPTOMS

In the early stages, there may not be any symptoms. Later, these symptoms may appear:

- Rectal bleeding and/or blood in or on the stool (bright red)
- Change in bowel habits and/or stools that are narrower than usual
- Stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness and/or cramps) and frequent gas pains
- Diarrhea, constipation or feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Weight loss for no apparent reason and/or constant tiredness
- Vomiting

### EARLY DETECTION

If you are at average risk for colorectal cancer, start having regular screening at age 50. If you are at greater risk, you may need to begin regular colorectal cancer screening at an earlier age. Choose one of the following screening tools:

- A colonoscopy every 10 years
- A fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunohistochemical test (FIT) every year, followed by a colonoscopy if something abnormal is found
- A flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years, in combination with yearly FOBT or FIT

### TREATMENT

- Surgery is the most common treatment.
- Chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy when the cancer has spread.