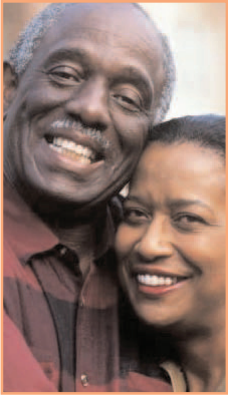


# What You Should Know About

## Preventing Colon Cancer



Colon cancer (or colorectal cancer as it is sometimes called) is cancer that is found in the colon or rectum. Colon cancer usually begins as one or more tiny growths, called polyps, in the colon or rectum. If not removed, these polyps may turn into cancer.

### Is colon cancer preventable?

**YES.** Colon cancer is the third leading cause of death from cancer in the United States. But it doesn't have to be! Removing growths early can prevent cancer. If cancer already exists, screening tests can find it early when it's easier to treat. Everyone 50 years of age or older should have regular colon cancer screening tests.

### Who is at risk for colon cancer?

Both men and women are at risk. Colon cancer occurs most often in people 50 years of age and older, and the risk increases as you get older. If you are 50 years old or older, it's time to get screened. Screening is the best way to find polyps before they turn into cancer or to find cancer and treat it. A family history of colon cancer may increase your risk for this disease. People at high risk for colon cancer may need to get tested more often and at an earlier age. It's best to speak with a health professional to discuss your options.

### What are the signs of colon cancer?

People who have polyps or colon cancer usually don't have signs of it, especially at first. That means that someone could have polyps or colon cancer and not even know it. That's why having regular screening tests is so important!

### When there are signs of a polyp or cancer, they may include:

- Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement)
- Stomach aches, pains or cramps that happen often without reason
- A change in bowel habits, such as having stools that are narrower than usual.
- Losing weight and not knowing why.

### What is a colonoscopy?

There are many different tests that check for colon cancer, but a colonoscopy is the most reliable. It's the only colon cancer exam that can actually remove growths before they turn into cancer. This exam is safe and doesn't hurt, although patients may be given pain medicine and muscle relaxants ahead of time. During the exam, a doctor looks at the inside walls of the colon through a bendable, lighted tube with a camera at one end. If any growths are found, they can usually be removed without pain right away. The exam lasts about 30 minutes and should be done every five to ten years.

