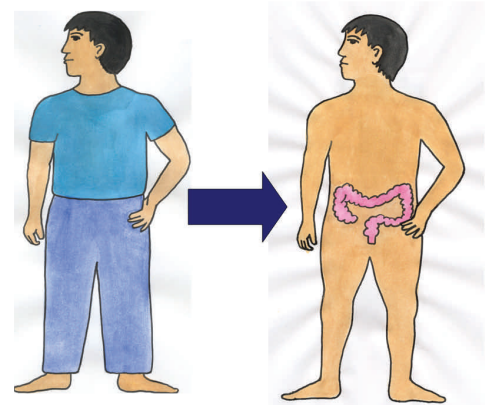




What is colon cancer?

The colon and rectum are parts of the digestive system. The colon and rectum removes solid waste (fecal matter or stool) from the body.

Colon cancer begins when cells that line the colon grow uncontrollably and form a grape-like tumor, called a polyp.



Why is colon cancer a concern for American Indian people?

American Indian men and women have the poorest survival rates of colon cancer than any other race.

What causes colon cancer?

There is no exact cause of colon cancer. Researchers are searching how certain changes in genetic mutations can cause polyps to become cancerous.

What are the risk factors of colon cancer?

- **Age:** the chance of colon cancer goes up after age 50.
- **Family history:** having parents, siblings or children with colon cancer.
- **Personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD):** including ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease is a condition in which the colon is inflamed over a long period of time.
- **Personal history of colorectal polyps or colon cancer:** if you have many and/or large polyps you are at increased risk. If you have had colon cancer you are more likely to develop cancer in other areas of the colon.
- **Diet:** a diet high in red meats (beef, lamb) and processed meats (hot dogs, bologna, and luncheon meat) can increase colon cancer risk.
- **Obesity:** if you are overweight, your risk of developing colon cancer is increased.
- **Smoking:** Some of the cancer-causing substances from smoking are swallowed and can cause digestive cancers.
- **Heavy alcohol use:** Heavy alcohol users have low levels of folic acid, a nutrient

What can you do to prevent colon cancer?

Currently, colon cancer cannot be prevented but it can be detected early by colon cancer screenings. The polyps can be removed before they turn into cancer.

What are the signs/symptoms of breast cancer?

Symptoms of colon cancer may include:

- A change in bowel habits: diarrhea, constipation or narrow stools that last for more than a few days.
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement even when you have gone to the bathroom.
- Rectal bleeding, dark stools or blood in the urine.
- Cramping or stomach pain
- Weakness and fatigue
- Weight loss

If you have these symptoms, it is very important to see your health care provider.

How can colon cancer be detected?

Colon cancer screening starts at age 50. It may start earlier for those at high risk. The following are the screening exams for colon cancer:

- ***Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT):*** An at home test where one takes a small stool sample and sends it in to check for blood in the stool.
- ***Flexible Sigmoidoscopy:*** a flexible lighted tube (sigmoidoscope) with a small camera is inserted into the rectum. The sigmoidoscope views the first half of the colon. If polyps are found, they can be removed.
- ***Colonoscopy:*** A flexible lighted tube with a small camera (colonoscope) is inserted into the rectum. The colonoscope views the entire colon. If polyps are found, they can be removed.
- ***Computed Tomography (CT) Colonography (virtual colonoscopy):*** A CT scanner takes x-rays of your body as it rotates around you while you lie on a table.

The information in the Gathering Basket education materials is not intended as medical advice, please consult your health care provider regarding treatment decisions.



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