

Colorectal Cancer

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Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or in the rectum. This year, approximately 2,700 Wisconsin residents will be diagnosed and more than 39% will die from this cancer. The symptoms include:

- RECTAL BLEEDING,
- CHANGES IN BOWEL HABITS, STOOLS THAT ARE NARROWER THAN USUAL,
- STOMACH DISCOMFORT AND FREQUENT GAS PAINS,
- DIARRHEA, CONSTIPATION, OR FEELING THAT THE BOWEL DOES NOT EMPTY COMPLETELY,
- WEIGHT LOSS FOR NO APPARENT REASON,
- VOMITING.

Men and women over age 50 are at risk for colorectal cancer. If anyone in your family has had colorectal cancer, you may be more at risk. People with a personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease, ulcerative colitis, or Crohn's disease are more at risk. Finally, research scientists feel that the high rate of colorectal cancer in the U.S may be connected to obesity, smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and a diet high in saturated fats, red meats and NO fruits or vegetables.

Here is the good news: When colorectal cancer is caught in the earlier stages, it is more easily "cured" at rates of 90% for colon cancer and 80% for rectal cancer. So what can you do? Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. If you smoke, STOP. Your doctor or nurse can provide you with information to help with that. If you are overweight, try to lose a few pounds. Don't drink alcohol excessively. In addition to these preventative measures, there are screenings that should be done to test for this cancer.

GET AN ANNUAL CHECKUP.

- If you are over age 40, have a rectal exam during your annual checkup. Fifteen percent of all rectal cancers can be detected by digital rectal exams.
- IF YOU ARE OVER AGE 50, in addition to the yearly rectal exam, have your stool tested for fecal occult (hidden) blood. This test can be done at home and more that 90% of people who have colorectal cancer will have small traces of blood in their stool.
- IF YOU ARE AGE 50 OR OLDER, there are 3 tests that are recommended to check if you have colorectal cancer. Your doctor may schedule a flexible sigmoidoscopy exam every 5 years, or a double-contrast barium enema every five years. Your doctor may suggest a colonoscopy and that only needs to be done every 10 years if it is negative. Talk with your health care provider to determine which test is right for you.

For more information, call the Vince Lombardi Cancer Hotline at (414) 649-7200 or 1-800-252-2990. You can also go to www.preventcancer.org for more information.

Remember our life is a gift from God, how we take care of ourselves and others is our gift back to God.