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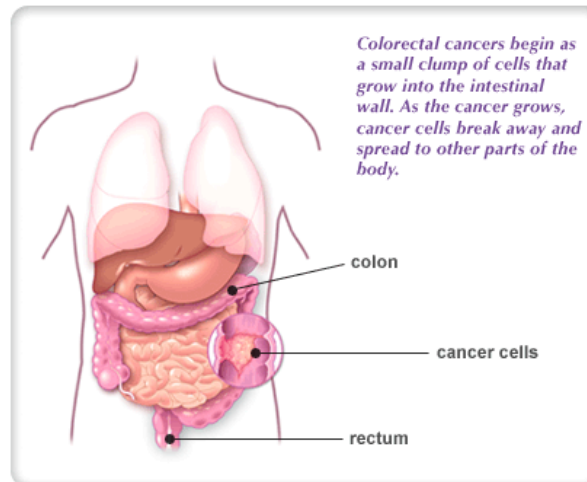
What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is a cancer that develops in the colon or the rectum. The colon and rectum are parts of the digestive system also called the gastrointestinal, or GI, system. The digestive system processes food for energy and rids the body of solid wastes (fecal matter).

In most people, colorectal cancer develops slowly over a period of several years. It usually begins as a non-cancerous polyp, which may eventually become cancerous. A polyp, which is a growth of tissue, develops on the lining of the colon or rectum. Certain kinds of polyps, called *adenomatous polyps* or *adenomas*, have the potential to become cancerous.

When cancer forms within a polyp, it can eventually begin to grow into the wall of the colon or rectum. Once they invade the wall, the cancer cells can grow into blood vessels or lymph vessels. Lymph vessels are thin, tiny channels that carry away waste and fluid. They first drain into nearby lymph nodes, which are bean-shaped structures that help fight against infections. When they spread into blood vessels, the cancer cells can travel to distant parts of the body. This process of spread is called *metastasis*.

More than 95% of colorectal cancers are *adenocarcinomas*. These are cancers of the glandular cells that line the inside layer of the wall of the colon and rectum.



For more information please use your Healthwise Handbook or call the 24-Hour Nurse Line at 1-800-421-1913.

Symptoms:

The following symptoms may indicate colorectal cancer. A doctor should be contacted to have the diagnostic test performed.

- ❖ A change in bowel habits
- ❖ Diarrhea or constipation lasting longer than two weeks
- ❖ Feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- ❖ Vomiting
- ❖ Blood in stool
- ❖ Recurring abdominal discomfort (gas, bloating, or cramps)
- ❖ Unexplained weight loss
- ❖ Constant fatigue
- ❖ Unexplained anemia



From HealthSmart,
a program of
Ivy Tech Community College
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Don't forget these other great resources:

Your Nurse Line Chat, Audio Health Information Library^o, and www.spectrumhs.com for links to reliable health information.