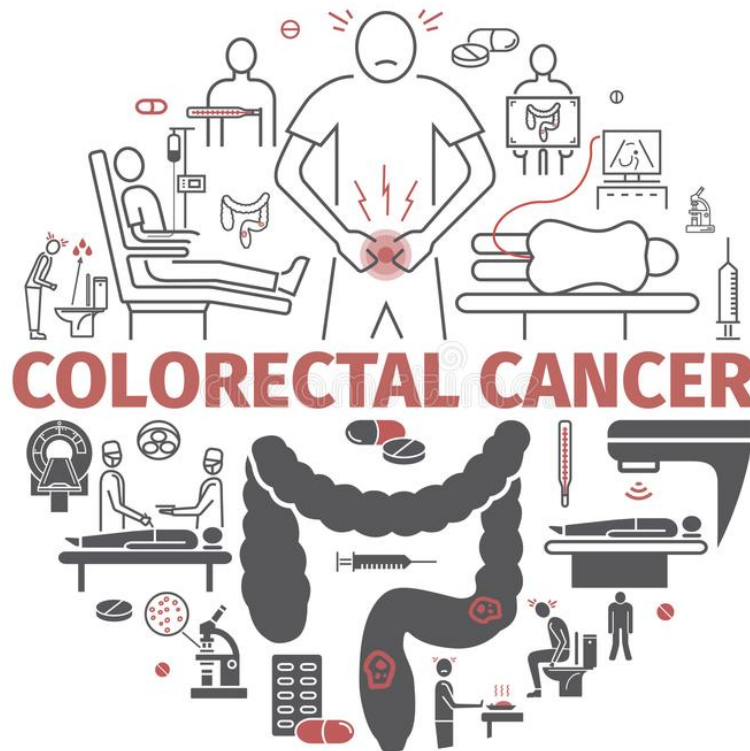


Screen it! Treat it! Beat it!

COLORECTAL CANCER SYMPTOMS

Some Helpful Facts.....

1. The right side of the colon is wider than the left side of the colon. Therefore, cancers that originate on the left side of the colon are more likely to cause partial or complete bowel obstructions. This can cause symptoms of constipation, narrowed stool, diarrhea, abdominal pains, cramps, and bloating; and can, therefore, be detected earlier than cancers that originate on the right side of the colon.
2. When colorectal cancer is in the early stages, it is typically silent – void of symptoms. This is why getting screened is so important. It picks up cancers that are silent and easily removed.

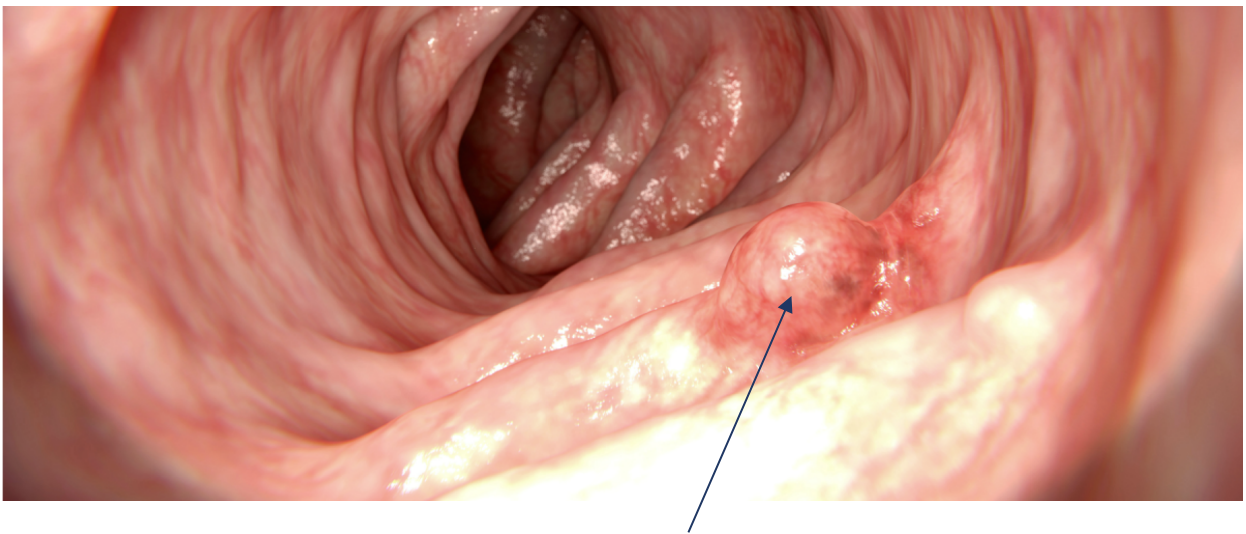


In the early stages of colorectal cancer, many people often experience no symptoms. This is why the disease is often referred to as “silent”. When symptoms do appear, they will likely vary, depending on the cancer’s size and location in the large intestine, also known as the colorectum, which is comprised of the colon and the rectum. Recent studies indicate that on average, patients will typically be diagnosed approximately 14 weeks after the onset of their symptoms. There is no association between overall duration of symptoms and the stage of the tumor. Therefore, it is best to get regular screenings rather than rely on colorectal cancer symptoms to alert one to the presence of a tumor. This is because colorectal cancer can grow for years before causing any symptoms. But, knowing what to look out for most certainly cannot hurt. A description of colorectal cancer symptoms appears below. Do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or concerns regarding this content.

What are the Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer?

A colorectal cancer will typically begin with the development of benign or non-cancerous polyp. Polyps develop when cells lining the colon reproduce too quickly. These polyps may become cancerous, invading the colon wall and surrounding blood vessels and spreading to other parts of the body.

People with colorectal cancer do not usually experience signs or symptoms in the early stages of the disease. When there is an onset of symptoms, they will likely vary, depending on the cancer’s size and location in the colorectum. Recent studies indicate that on average, patients will typically be diagnosed approximately 14 weeks after the onset of their symptoms. There is no association between overall duration of symptoms and the stage of the tumor. Therefore, it is best to get regular screenings rather than rely on colorectal cancer symptoms to alert one to the presence of a tumor. This is because colorectal cancer can grow silently for years before alerting you to its presence. But, knowing what to look out for most certainly cannot hurt.



Tumor Originating in a Young Adult’s Colon

Photo Courtesy: <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/theres-a-troubling-rise-in-colorectal-cancer-among-young-adults--66354>

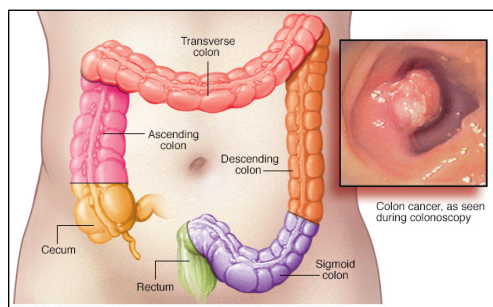
Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer May Include The Following:

- **Bloody Stools**
- **Prolonged Constipation/Diarrhea**
- **Narrow Stools**
- **Abdominal Cramping**
- **Unexplained Weight Loss/Loss of Appetite**
- **Sense of Fullness**
- **Nausea & Vomiting**
- **Gas & Bloating**
- **Fatigue/Lethargy**

Please see below for a description of each symptom.

• **Bloody Stools**

This is the most common symptom associated with colorectal cancer. As a tumor increases in size, the colon can become constricted or narrow and passage of fecal matter can cause the tumor to bleed. Bright red blood can result if the tumor is near the anus or toward the end of the colon. But if the tumor originates on the right side of the colon (please see photo below), it is more common for the blood to be hidden inside the stools and quite dry. You may also see the blood on the toilet paper, which is quite separate from the fecal matter. It's a good idea to get into the habit of looking into the toilet before flushing to see if there is any blood mixed into the fecal matter or in the toilet bowl water.



Parts of the colorectum, beginning with the cecum and ending at the rectum.

[Right Side of the Colon extends from the Cecum to the transverse colon](#)
[Left Side of the Colon Extends from the transverse colon to the Rectum](#)

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/colon-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20353669>

- **Prolonged Constipation/Diarrhea**

Constipation: People who suffer from constipation are not moving their bowels every day. Instead, they are having a bowel movement fewer than 3 times a week. This is not necessarily a sign of colorectal cancer. Instead, it may be the body sending you a message that some dietary changes need to be made or that exercise needs to be introduced into your daily routine to help move your bowels. However, prolonged constipation can also be a symptom of colorectal cancer. In the first part of the colon, waste material is mushy and can easily navigate around anything that gets in its way. But as it nears the end of the colon, stool solidifies and is less forgiving of obstacles. A tumor in the rectum or far end of the colon (the left side of the colon) can make it very difficult for waste to get by, thereby causing constipation. This may eventually lead to an obstruction.

Diarrhea: Prolonged diarrhea (more than a couple of weeks in duration) may be a symptom of colon cancer and should be followed up with a visit to the family doctor. Make a conscious effort to know your bowel habits so you can recognize any changes that should be reported to your family doctor. Ongoing diarrhea can be attributed to a few other causes such as Irritable Bowel Disorder or Inflammatory Bowel Disease but it's best to report your symptoms to your family doctor who will refer you to the appropriate specialist.

- **Narrow Stools**

The look of your stool when it leaves the body can provide clues as to what is going on inside your body. For example, a narrow or small-caliber stool may indicate that the waste had to squeeze by an obstacle on its way out. In the case of colon or rectal cancer, that obstacle would be a tumor in the latter part of the colon or the rectum. Narrow stools are often referred to as pencil-thin stools because they may have a similar appearance to pencils in terms of their size in the presence of an advanced tumor. There may, however, be other reasons accounting for narrow stools. Always check with your treating physician when experiencing changes in bowel habits.

- **Abdominal Cramps**

Sometimes a tumor may cause a bowel obstruction, which is basically a roadblock in the colon, which can prevent your stools from moving forward. This can cause abdominal cramping. The severity of the blockage can prevent solids, liquids, and even gas from moving forward in the colorectum. This leads to abdominal cramps that can be quite painful, especially if the blockage restricts blood flow to the colon. Severe cramps may also indicate that a tumor has perforated the bowel wall; a bowel perforation is a medical emergency and should be tended to immediately.

- **Unexplained Weight Loss/Loss of Appetite**

An unwanted weight loss accompanied by other symptoms can indicate the presence of a colorectal cancer. Any discomfort or pain caused by a tumor can lead to loss of appetite, which in turn results in weight loss. Unintentional weight loss can result from the release of chemicals from the tumor that can increase one's metabolism.

- **Sense of Fullness**

When a tumor grows toward the end of the colon or in the rectum, it may cause you to feel a sense of fullness, as though you haven't completely evacuated. This is because your body is experiencing a sensation that there is something else present by the exit. Your body does not know that there is a tumor and it is attached, so your body cannot expel it. Your body believes the tumour is a stubborn piece of waste, so you acquire that "I still have to go" sensation that cannot be relieved.

- **Nausea & Vomiting**

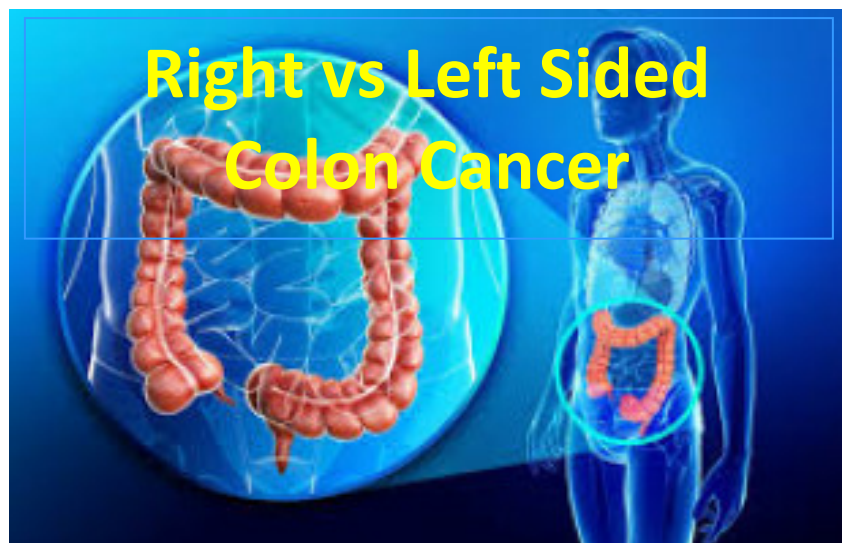
Nausea and vomiting can occur for many different reasons. In the minority of cases, nausea and vomiting can be symptoms of colorectal cancer. When a tumour originates on the right side of the colon, the digestive contents may have a difficult time moving forward. This can therefore cause a backup of food higher up in the digestive tract which can cause nausea and possibly vomiting.

- **Gas & Bloating**

Regular gas and bloating may be a sign that a tumor is growing in the colon and occasionally may be a sign of a blockage (bowel obstruction). Even if the tumor isn't large enough to cause a bowel obstruction on its own, stool may periodically become caught on the tumor while it is passing by, causing a temporary obstruction. While your bowel is blocked and air is trapped, you will be bloated. When the blockage resolves itself, all that air will need somewhere to go, and you will be gassy, or bloated.

- **Fatigue/Lethargy**

The presence of a tumor can cause iron-deficiency induced anemia, a condition that can cause you to feel weak and tired (lethargic). Tumors tend to bleed, which results in a loss of iron – an element that transports oxygen to your cells. This symptom is characteristic of tumors in the first part of the colon (right side of the colon). The right side of the colon is wider than the left side of the colon. As a result, tumours on the right side of the colon can become quite large and bleed quite a bit before causing any other colon cancer symptoms. The blood from right sided colon cancers usually dries before leaving the body as well, which also allows the bleeding to go undetected because it becomes quite dark and mixes in with the stool.



Colon cancer can be present for several years before symptoms develop. Symptoms vary according to the side in which the tumour originates in the colorectum.

Right Sided Cancers of the Colon:

The right side of the colon is wider than the left side of the colon and, therefore, more spacious, and cancers of the right colon can grow to large sizes before they cause any abdominal symptoms. Typically, right-sided cancers cause iron deficiency anemia due to the slow loss of blood over a long period of time. Iron deficiency anemia causes fatigue, weakness and shortness of breath. Right sided colon cancers are also treated differently because their biology is quite different especially in the metastatic setting. Please refer to our Treatment Section for a thorough description of treatment options or contact us for assistance.

Left Sided Cancers of the Colon:

The left side of the colon is less spacious when compared to the right side of the colon and therefore narrower. Therefore, cancers of the left colon are more likely to cause partial or complete bowel obstructions. Cancers causing partial bowel obstruction can cause symptoms such as constipation, narrowed stool, diarrhea, abdominal pains, cramps, and bloating. Bright red blood in the stool may also indicate a growth near the end of the left colon or rectum. Left sided colon cancers are treated differently than right sided colon cancers because their biology is quite different, most notably in the metastatic setting.

Though blood in your stool may be a sign of colorectal cancer, it can, however, indicate **other** conditions. Bright red blood you notice on bathroom tissue more commonly comes from hemorrhoids or minor tears (fissures) in your anus, for example. In addition, certain foods, such as beets or red licorice, can turn your stools red. Iron supplements and some anti-diarrhea medications may make stools black. Regardless, it's best to have any sign of blood or change in your stools checked promptly by your doctor because it can be a sign of something more serious. Best to err on the side of caution.

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