

# ASCO ANSWERS

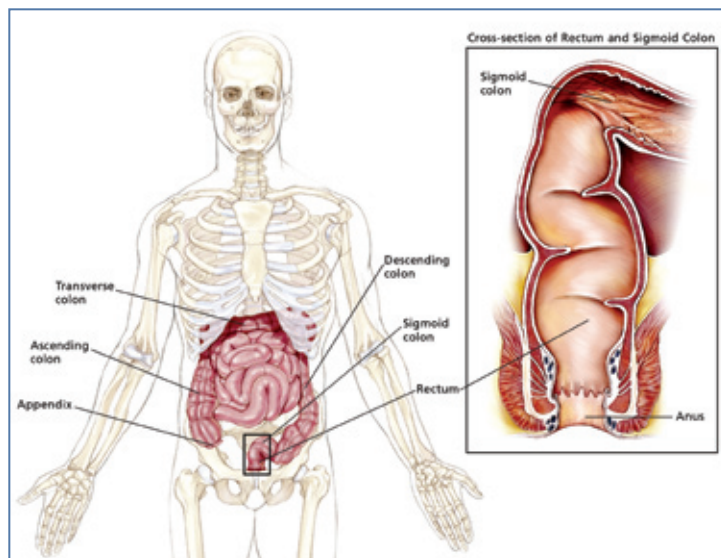
## COLORECTAL CANCER

### WHAT IS COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which normal cells in the lining of the colon or rectum begin to change, grow without control, and no longer die. The cell growth may begin as a noncancerous polyp that can become a cancerous tumor over time. Colorectal cancer often begins in the tissue lining the inside of the colon or rectum, forming a type of tumor called an adenocarcinoma. Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer diagnosed in men and women in the United States.

### WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE COLON AND RECTUM?

The colon and rectum make up the large intestine, which plays an important role in the body's ability to process waste. The large intestine turns food digested by the stomach and small intestine into fecal matter that is excreted by the anus.



Find additional cancer information at [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net).

### WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing a cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and if it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are five stages for colorectal cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Illustrations for these stages are available at [www.cancer.net/colorectal](http://www.cancer.net/colorectal).

### HOW IS COLORECTAL CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of colorectal cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Colon cancer is often treated differently than rectal cancer. For cancer that is not advanced, surgery to remove the tumor usually is the first treatment. Additional treatment may be given to lower the risk of cancer returning and/or treat metastatic cancer. This may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy (treatment that targets faulty genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth and development), and surgery to remove metastases (cancer that has spread past the colon and rectum). When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of colorectal cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health-care team.

### HOW CAN I COPE WITH COLORECTAL CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What type of colon or rectal cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the colon or rectal cancer?
- Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- Who will be guiding and administering my treatment? Does this person have experience treating colorectal cancer?
- How will this treatment benefit me?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at [www.cancer.net/colorectal](http://www.cancer.net/colorectal).

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*Information in ASCO's patient education materials is not intended as medical advice or as a substitute for the treating doctor's own professional judgment; nor does it imply ASCO endorsement of any product, service, or company.*

*ASCO believes that all treatment decisions should be made between patients and their doctors.*

**For more information, visit ASCO's patient website,  
[www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net), or call 888-651-3038.**

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Adenoma:**

A specific type of polyp that is likely to become cancerous

### **Benign:**

A tumor that is not cancerous

### **Biopsy:**

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

### **Chemotherapy:**

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

### **Colonoscopy:**

A test that allows doctors to look inside the colon and rectum for polyps or cancer using a colonoscope (lighted tube)

### **Lymph node:**

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

### **Malignant:**

A tumor that is cancerous

### **Metastasis:**

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

### **Oncologist:**

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

### **Polyp:**

A growth in the colon or rectum that is a risk factor for colorectal cancer

### **Prognosis:**

Chance of recovery

### **Radiation therapy:**

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

### **Tumor:**

A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy