

Facts About Rectal Cancer

- More than 150,000 Americans are diagnosed annually with cancer of the colon or rectum
- Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the USA

Risk Factors for Rectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer can occur even in individuals without any known risk factors. However, the American Cancer Society notes the following characteristics as risk factors:

- Increasing age
- Diet high in saturated fat and red meat
- Personal history of colorectal cancer
- Colorectal polyps
- Obesity and inactivity
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's Disease
- Excessive alcohol

Symptoms of Rectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer can present without any symptoms. However, symptoms can include:

- Change in bowel habits, such as alternating episodes of diarrhea and constipation
- Rectal bleeding or dark and tarry stools
- Abdominal pain and bloating
- Anemia and fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

Diagnosis

Your doctor can recommend specific labs and procedures to help make the diagnosis of rectal cancer. These tests can include endoscopy within the colon and rectum with biopsy by a surgeon or gastroenterologist, a blood test called CEA, imaging such as CT scans, and physical exam including digital rectal exam.

Treatment

The primary treatment for cancer of the rectum is surgery. For cancers that have not spread out of the local area, surgery alone may cure your cancer. Based on the size of the tumor, the level

of invasion, and lymph node involvement, your doctors may recommend chemotherapy and radiation before or after surgery. Sometimes radiation can help preserve the anus and prevent the need for a permanent colostomy (external stool bag).

External Beam Radiation Therapy

External beam radiation therapy delivers CT guided photons and electrons precisely to the tumor while sparing healthy tissue. Treatment planning for radiation therapy is performed using a 16 slice Philips Brilliance™ CT equipped with respiratory gating which enables 4-Dimensional planning for superior radiation treatment delivery. Radiation is delivered on week days in sessions usually lasting under 30 minutes. Your radiation oncologist, physicist, and dosimetrist will calculate the exact number of weeks of therapy. Side effects can include but are not limited to fatigue, skin irritation, swelling, diarrhea, infection, and bleeding. Tell your radiation oncologist or nurse about any symptoms you may have and how best to address them.