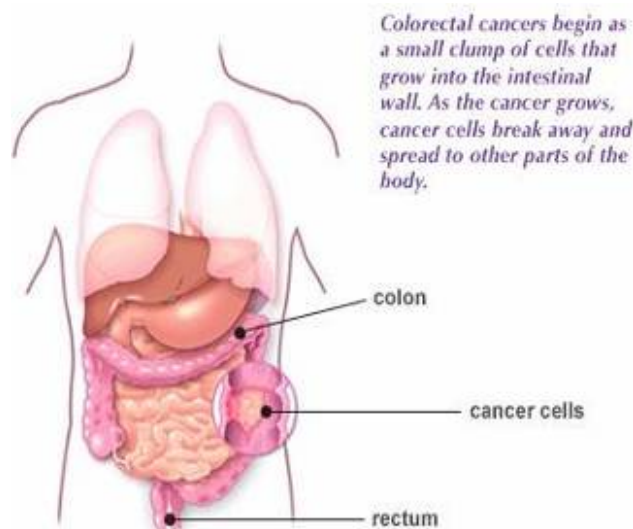


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Colorectal cancer

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer, is characterised by the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells inside the colon and or rectum. In most instances, colorectal cancer is thought to develop initially from small growths called polyps that can form in the lining of the colon or rectum. Although the majority of polyps never become cancerous, cancerous polyps are responsible for most cases of colorectal cancer. If detected at an early stage, a cancerous polyp can usually be removed; however, there are often no initial symptoms and the cancer may have spread to other parts of the body (metastasised) before the patient is diagnosed.



Prevalence

- Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of death from cancer across all cancer types in men and women in Europe¹ and is the third most commonly reported cancer in the world, with over one million cases occurring annually^{2,3}.

- More than 600,000 people die every year from the disease worldwide³.

Risk factors

- Age: More than 90% of cases are diagnosed in individuals over the age of 50³.
- A personal or family history of colorectal cancer and / or intestinal polyps³.
- Lifestyle factors including obesity, physical inactivity, smoking, high alcohol consumption and a poor diet³.

Symptoms

Early stage* colorectal cancer can often present without symptoms. However, symptoms of colorectal cancer can include:

- Unexplained weight loss.
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum.
- A feeling of not having emptied your bowel properly after a bowel movement.
- A change in normal bowel habit (such as diarrhoea or constipation) without apparent reason and lasting longer than six weeks.
- Blood in, or on, the stools.

Management of colorectal cancer

Treatment options vary in accordance with the stage of the cancer – its size, position in the colon or rectum, whether it has spread to other parts of the body, and the physical condition of the patient. In general, the treatment options for colorectal cancer are:

For early stage* colorectal cancer

- **Surgery** is the main treatment option for patients whose colorectal cancer has not spread to other parts of the body (e.g. to the liver or lungs).
- **Chemotherapy** may also be given after surgery (adjuvant treatment) to reduce the risks of the cancer returning.

For metastatic colorectal cancer

- In some cases, surgery may also be an option for patients with cancer that has spread to other parts of the body, in particular to the liver.
- **Chemotherapy** aims to reduce symptoms, improve quality of life and extend survival for as long as possible. Chemotherapy drugs can be given intravenously (directly into the blood) or orally.

Chemotherapies can be given as single agents but are now increasingly being administered in combination with other chemotherapies with the aim of increasing efficacy.

- **Biological therapy:** A relatively new approach to cancer treatment, biological therapies (also called targeted therapies) stimulate the body's immune system to inhibit the growth and spread of cancer by modulating specific molecular and cellular processes involved in tumour growth and progression. Biological therapy can include monoclonal antibodies, vaccines and gene therapies. As biological therapies precisely target cancer-specific processes, they may potentially be more effective than other types of treatment (such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy) and less toxic to non-cancerous, healthy cells⁴. Several types of biological therapy exist for the treatment of advanced breast cancer. These are either given as monotherapy or in conjunction with other therapies at various stages of advanced disease (in accordance with their approved label).

* Early stage refers to cancer that hasn't spread to the lymph nodes and / or other parts of the body

References

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3. Garcia M et al. Global Cancer Facts & Figures. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society, 2007.
4. National Cancer Institute. Targeted cancer therapies. Last accessed May 2010 at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Therapy/targeted>