

# Colorectal Cancer Glossary

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### A

**Abdomen:** (AB-do-men) The part of the body between the chest and the pelvis that contains organs including the pancreas, stomach, small intestine, large intestine (colon), liver and gallbladder.

**Adjuvant therapy** Medical treatment provided to a patient in addition to surgery to aid in the killing of cancer cells; adjuvant (meaning one that helps) chemotherapy and radiation therapy are both used in colorectal cancer treatment in an effort to eliminate all cancerous cells from the body, increasing the chances for a cure.

**Anus:** The opening of the rectum where solid waste or poop passes to the outside of the body.

### B

**Benign:** (beh-NINE) An abnormal growth that is not cancer. And does not spread from one part of the body to another. It is usually not dangerous or life threatening.

**Biopsy:** (BY-ahp-see) The removal of a sample of tissue that is examined under a microscope to look for cancer cells.

**Bowel:** Another name for the intestine, part of the digestive tract below the stomach. The bowel includes the small intestine and the large intestine (colon).

### C

**Cancer:** A disease in which cells grow out of control. Cancer cells can invade nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body. There are over 100 different types of cancers, including colorectal cancer.

**Carcinoma** Cancer derived from the cells lining organs or epithelial tissue.

**CAT Scan** A series of detailed pictures of areas inside the body, taken from different angles; the pictures are created by a computer linked to an x-ray machine. Also called computerized axial tomography, computed tomography (CT scan), or computerized tomography.

**Cecum** [see-cum] The first part of the large intestines, located on the right side of the abdomen. The appendix is attached to the cecum.

**Cell** The smallest living unit capable of independent existence. Humans are made up of billions and billions of cells.

**Chemotherapy:** (kee-mo-THER-a-pee) Treatment with anticancer drugs. May be oral (pills/capsules) or intravenous (IV), where the chemotherapy is injected into the veins/blood

**Clinical trial:** A research study that tests how well new medical treatments or other interventions work in people. Each study is designed to test new methods of screening, prevention, diagnosis or treatment of a disease.

**Colectomy:** A surgical procedure to remove all or part of your colon. Colectomy surgery usually requires other procedures to reattach the remaining portions of your digestive system and permit waste to leave your body.

**Colon:** The long, coiled, tube-like organ (also known as the large bowel or large intestine) that removes water from digested food. The remaining material, solid waste called "stool," moves through the colon and the rectum and leaves the body through the anus. Parts of the colon include the cecum, ascending colon, transverse colon, descending colon, and sigmoid colon. The average colon is about six feet long.

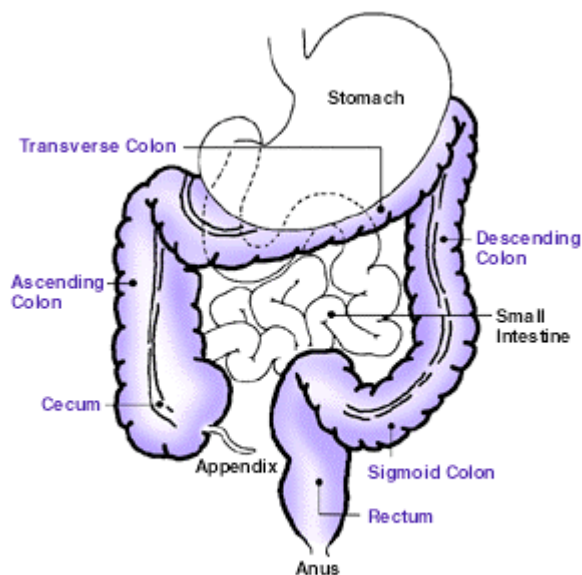


Diagram of the Colon and Rectum

**Colonoscope:** A flexible, lighted instrument with a tiny built-in camera used to view the inside of the entire colon and rectum.

**Colonoscopy:** An examination in which the doctor looks at the internal walls of the entire colon through a flexible, lighted instrument called a colonoscope. The doctor may collect samples of tissue or cells for closer examination. The doctor may also remove polyps during a colonoscopy.

**Colorectal:** Related to the colon, rectum, or both.

**Colostomy:** (ko-LAHS-toe-mee) An opening into the colon from the outside of the body. A colostomy provides a new path for waste material to leave the body after part of the colon has been removed.

## D

**Digital rectal examination (DRE):** An examination in which a doctor inserts a lubricated, gloved finger into the rectum to feel for abnormalities.

## E

**Endoscopy** [en-**dahs**-kuh-pee] Inspection of body organs or cavities using a flexible, lighted tube called an *endoscope*. This method is referred to by different names depending on the area of examination, such as: esophagoscopy (esophagus), gastroscopy (stomach), upper endoscopy (small intestine), sigmoidoscopy (lower third of the large intestine), and colonoscopy (entire large intestine).

**External Radiation** The radiation comes from a machine. Most patients go to the hospital or clinic for their treatment.

## F

**Fecal immunochemical test (FIT)** [(**fee**-kuhl **im**-you-no-**KIM**-uh-kuhl test] A newer test to look for "hidden" blood in the stool, which could be a sign of cancer. The test is not affected by medications or foods, though it still requires 2 or 3 specimens. The FIT test is specific for human blood in the lower digestive tract (colon/rectum).

**Fecal occult blood test (FOBT):** A test to check for hidden blood in stool. Fecal refers to stool. Occult means hidden. Requires certain medication and food restrictions. Sometimes called guaiac test (See also Stool Test.)

**Feces** The matter discharged from the bowel during bowel movements consisting mostly of the waste material from food. (Also called stool)

**Flexible sigmoidoscopy:** A procedure in which the doctor looks inside the rectum and the lower portion of the colon (sigmoid colon) through a flexible, lighted tube called a sigmoidoscope. The doctor may collect samples of tissue or cells for closer examination and remove some small polyps within view.

## G

**Gastroenterologist:** A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating disorders of the digestive system, which includes the esophagus, stomach, pancreas, small intestine, large intestine (colon), and liver.

**Gastrointestinal tract:** The part of the digestive tract where the body processes food and eliminates waste. It includes the esophagus, stomach, liver, small intestine, large intestine (colon), and rectum.

## I

**Internal Radiation** Also referred to as implant radiation or brachytherapy. The radiation comes from radioactive material placed in thin tubes put directly into or near the tumor. The patient stays in the hospital, and the implants generally remain in place for several days. Usually they are removed before the patient goes home.

**Intestine:** The long, tube-shaped organ in the abdomen, also called the "bowel," that completes the process of digestion. There are both small intestines and large intestines (the large intestine is also called the colon).

**Intravenous (IV):** (in-tra-VEE-nus) Injected into a blood vessel.

## L

**Large intestine** the tube like organ, also called the colon that extends from the small intestine at one end to the rectum at the other end. The large intestine is the last part of the digestive tract. It is divided into sections: ascending beginning at the cecum on the right side, transverse which is horizontal and descending which is on the left side and includes the sigmoid and the rectum. The primary function is the absorption of water and the formation and collection of feces.

**Laxative** Medications that cause the bowels to get rid of solid waste or poop. These medication typically increase the action of the intestines or stimulate the addition of water to the stool to increase its bulk and ease its passage out of the body. Laxatives often are prescribed to treat constipation.

**Lymph node:** (limf) Lymph nodes store special cells that can trap cancer cells or bacteria that are traveling through the body in the lymph fluid. The lymph nodes are critical for the body's immune response and are principal sites where many immune reactions are initiated. During a physical examination, doctors often look for swollen lymph nodes in areas where lymph nodes are abundant, including the neck, around the collarbone, the armpit (axilla), and the groin.

## M

**Malignant:** (ma-LIG-nant) A cancerous lump or tumor that grows in an uncontrolled manner that can invade nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.

**Medical oncologist:** (on-KOL-o-jist) A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancer using chemotherapy, hormonal therapy, and biological therapy. A medical oncologist often serves as the main caretaker of someone who has cancer and coordinates treatment provided by other specialists.

**Metastasis:** (meh-TAS-ta-sis) The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. Tumors formed from cells that have spread are called "secondary tumors" and contain cells that are like those in the original (primary) tumor. The plural is metastases.

**MRI** Magnetic resonance imaging – specialized way to look at the organs of the body using magnetic energy and a computer.

## P

**Pathologist** A doctor who examines the cells and tissues removed during surgery.

**Perforation** Tearing or puncturing.

**PET scan** Positron emission tomography – specialized way to look at the organs of the body according to how fast they use radioactive sugar; can be used to detect cancerous cells. Cancer cells have a high metabolism and use sugar faster than non-cancerous cells.

**Polyp:** An abnormal growth inside the colon or rectum. These growths can sometimes turn into cancer if they are not removed.



**Polypectomy:** (pol-ee-PEC-toe-mee) Removal of a polyp during a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.

**Polyposis** The development of numerous polyps.

## R

**Radiation therapy:** (ray-dee-AY-shun) The use of high-energy radiation from X-rays, gamma rays, neutrons and other sources to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Radiation may come from a machine outside the body (external-beam radiation therapy), or it may come from radioactive material placed in the body in the area near cancer cells (internal radiation therapy, implant radiation or brachytherapy).

**Rectum:** The last 6 to 10 inches of the large intestine. The rectum stores solid waste (poop) until it leaves the body through the anus.

**Recurrence:** Cancer that has come back after treatment. Local recurrence means that the cancer has come back at the same place as the original cancer. Regional recurrence means that the cancer has come back in the lymph nodes near the first site. Distant recurrence is when cancer metastasizes after treatment to organs or tissues (such as the lungs, liver, bone marrow, or brain) farther from the original site than the regional lymph nodes.

**Remission:** The period of time during which there is an apparent absence of cancer in the body.

**Resection (colectomy)** Resection is another name for any operation that removes tissue or part of an organ. A colectomy is a type of resection for colorectal cancer that removes the tumor and part of the colon or rectum on either side. The goal of bowel resection is to take out the part of the colon or rectum where the cancer is. Nearby lymph nodes are taken out and tested for cancer. Then healthy parts of the colon or rectum are sewn back together.

**Risk factor:** A habit, trait, condition or genetic alteration that increases a person's chance of developing a disease. Risk factors for cancer include: age, family history, tobacco use, poor nutrition, obesity, environmental exposures, and excessive alcohol use.

## S

**Screening test:** Tests used to check, or screen, for disease when there are no symptoms. Recommended screening tests for colorectal cancer include the fecal occult blood test, flexible sigmoidoscopy, and colonoscopy.

**Sedation** To make sleepy, calm, or relaxed. Drugs to cause sedation are often used along with medicines to numb an area for a procedure like a colonoscopy.

**Side effects:** Problems that occur when treatment affects healthy cells. Common side effects of cancer treatment are fatigue, nausea, vomiting, decreased blood cell counts, hair loss and mouth sores.

**Sigmoidoscope:** A flexible, lighted instrument with a tiny built-in camera that allows the doctor to view the lining of the rectum and lower portion of the colon.

**Sigmoidoscopy:** (sig-moid-OSS-ko-pee) A procedure in which a health care provider looks inside the rectum and the lower one-third of the colon using a thin, lighted tube called a sigmoidoscope. Samples of tissue or cells may be collected for examination under a microscope.

**Stage:** A number representing the degree to which a cancer has spread, including whether the disease has metastasized from the original site to other parts of the body.

**Staging:** Performing exams and tests to learn the extent of the cancer within the body, especially whether the disease has spread from the original site to other parts of the body.

**Stoma:** (STO-ma) A surgically created opening from an area inside the body to the outside.

**Stool:** The waste matter discharged in a bowel movement. Also see feces.

**Stool card test:** A test to check for hidden blood in the bowel movement. (See also Fecal Occult Blood Test, Fecal Immunochemical Test.)

## T, U, V

**Tumor:** (TOO-mer) An abnormal mass of tissue that results from excessive cell growth/division. Tumors perform no useful body function. They may be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).

**Virtual Colonoscopy** Virtual Colonoscopy is a recently developed technique that uses a CT scanner and computer virtual reality software to look inside the body without having to insert a long tube (Conventional Colonoscopy) into the colon or without having to fill the colon with liquid barium (Barium Enema). Read more.

*Sources: CDC, MayClinic.com, WebMD.com, Colorectal Cancer Alliance, ANTHC, and American Cancer Society*