

Facts About

COLORECTAL CANCER

HOW COMMON IS COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the US, affecting both men and women. More than 145,000 people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer each year, with approximately 56,000 people dying of this disease.

HOW DOES COLORECTAL CANCER DEVELOP?

Colorectal cancer usually develops from precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon or rectum. Screening tests can find precancerous polyps, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early, when treatment is most effective.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COLORECTAL CANCER?

Polyps and colorectal cancer do not always cause symptoms, especially at first. But sometimes symptoms include:

- Blood in or on the stool
- A change in bowel habits, such as having stools that are narrower than usual
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain, aches, or cramps in the stomach

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. These symptoms may also be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know what is causing them is to consult a doctor.

I HAVE A FAMILY HISTORY OF COLORECTAL CANCER. HOW DOES THAT AFFECT MY RISK?

Close relatives (parents, siblings, or children) of a person who has had colorectal cancer are somewhat more likely to develop this type of cancer themselves, especially if the family member developed the cancer at a young age. If many family members have had colorectal cancer, the risks are even greater.

WHEN SHOULD I BE SCREENED?

You should begin screening for colorectal cancer soon after turning 50, then continue getting screened at regular intervals. However, you may need to be tested earlier or more often than other people if:

- You or a close relative have had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer; or
- You have inflammatory bowel disease.

Talk to your doctor about when you should begin screening and how often you should be tested.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING?

Screening increases the odds that colorectal cancers will be found at a localized stage, when the five-year survival rate is 90%. Furthermore, screening can identify polyps, which if removed can prevent colorectal cancer from developing. If all adults age 50 and older were screened for colon cancer, we could cut the death rate from this disease in half—saving approximately 30,000 lives per year.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO SCREEN FOR COLORECTAL CANCER?

A colonoscopy is the most effective screening method for colorectal cancer. The test allows physicians to look directly at the entire colon and identify precancerous growths (polyps), which they can remove immediately. This is the only test where physicians can remove polyps without surgery or another procedure. In addition, colonoscopies are painless, as patients are sedated.

WHO SHOULD PERFORM COLONOSCOPIES?

Choose a board-certified gastroenterologist or surgeon with extensive experience performing colonoscopies. A gastroenterologist specializes in gastrointestinal diseases and has received specialized training. Non-gastroenterologists are five times more likely to miss colorectal cancer during colonoscopy than are gastroenterologists, according to research.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING AND PREVENTION?

Capital Gastroenterology Consultants developed a special colorectal cancer education section accessible from www.capitalgastro.com. In addition, the following websites and information lines provide useful resources on colorectal cancer:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Screen for Life Campaign
www.cdc.gov/screenforlife
1-800-232-4636
- American Cancer Society
Colorectal Cancer Education Campaign
www.cancer.org/colonmd
1-800-ACS-2345
- Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
www.preventcancer.org/colorectal
1-800-227-2732
- Colorectal Cancer Roundtable
www.nccrt.org
- National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance
www.eif.nccra.org
818-760-7722

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Capital Gastroenterology Consultants (CGC) has ten board-certified physicians and a nurse practitioner at four locations in Montgomery County. The practice provides complete diagnostic testing and therapies for simple and complex GI disorders. CGC participates in numerous clinical trials and has an electronic medical records (EMR) system enabling physicians to generate immediate reports and instantly access all patient records.

PHYSICIANS

James A. Butler, M.D.	Robert F. Musselman, M.D.
Alan J. Diamond, M.D.	Barry M. Rubin, M.D.
Robert G. Finkel, M.D.	Michael S. Schindler, M.D.
Joseph J. Genovese, Jr., M.D.	Zaifi Shanavas, M.D.
Milton J. Koch, M.D.	F. Karl Byars, CRNP
Arnold G. Levy, M.D.	

SILVER SPRING OFFICE

10801 Lockwood Drive #200
Silver Spring, MD 20901
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm

ROCKVILLE OFFICE

15005 Shady Grove Road #310
Rockville, MD 20850
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm

GERMANTOWN OFFICE

20528 Boland Farm Road #201
Germantown, MD 20876
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm

OLNEY OFFICE

3410 Olandwood Court #206
Olney, MD 20832
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm

ENDOSCOPIC SURGICAL CENTRE OF MARYLAND, LLC

10801 Lockwood Drive #110
Silver Spring, MD 20901
Phone: 301-593-5110
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 7am–4:30pm
TTY Users Call Maryland Relay #711

ENDOSCOPIC SURGICAL CENTRE OF MARYLAND–NORTH, LLC

15005 Shady Grove Road #300
Rockville, MD 20850
Phone: 301-762-1280
Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 7am–5:30pm
TTY Users Call Maryland Relay #711