

COLORECTAL CANCER FACT SHEET

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the colon or rectum, which are parts of the large bowel. It is one of the common cancers affecting both men and women. When detected early, colorectal cancer can often be treated successfully.

Colorectal cancer in Sri Lanka & Worldwide

According to National Cancer Control Programme, colorectal cancer is among the leading cancers in Sri Lanka, and the number of cases is increasing. According to GLOBOCAN estimates, over 1.1 million new cases are diagnosed and more than 530,000 deaths occur worldwide due to colorectal cancer in 2022.

In Sri Lanka, more than 3000 new cases have been identified and more than 500 deaths has been reported in 2020 in both males & females due to colorectal cancer.

Early detection and healthy lifestyle changes can reduce risk and improve survival.

Risk Factors

- Increasing age, especially after 50 years
- Family history of colorectal cancer
- Family history of bowel polyps
- Low-fibre diet
- High intake of processed meat or red meat
- Lack of physical activity
- Overweight and obesity
- Smoking and alcohol use
- Diabetes and some bowel diseases
- Previous history of bowel polyps

Prevention

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and high-fibre foods
- Reduce intake of processed meat and unhealthy food
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid smoking and alcohol consumption.
- Seek medical advice for bowel symptoms early

Early Detection – Important Points

- Colorectal cancer may develop slowly over several years.
- Finding the disease early improves the chance of a cure/ survival.
- Do not ignore bowel symptoms that last more than two weeks
- Seek medical advice for bleeding from the rectum



- People with a family history may need earlier medical assessment & screening.
- Screening tests may help detect disease early.

Signs and Symptoms

- Blood in stools or rectal bleeding
- Change in bowel habits
- long term alternating constipation and diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain or bloating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness or weakness due to anaemia

Treatment

Treatment depends on the stage of the disease and the patient's overall health.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation helps patients return to normal daily activities after treatment. Support may include nutritional care, physical rehabilitation, counselling, stoma care, and emotional support.

Palliative Care

Palliative care helps improve comfort and quality of life for patients with advanced cancer. It includes pain relief, symptom management, psychological support, and family support.

Survivorship

Many people continue active and healthy lives after colorectal cancer treatment. Regular follow-up visits are important for monitoring health and managing long-term effects.

Diagnosis

- History evaluation
- Digital rectal examination
- Laboratory tests (Stool for occult blood / FIT test)
- Colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy
- Biopsy to confirm cancer
- CT scan, MRI scan, or ultrasound if needed

Treatment Options

- Surgery
- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy in selected patients
- Targeted therapy or specialised medicines
- Supportive and symptom-relieving treatment



Services Available in Sri Lanka

- Cancer Early Detection Centres
- Surgical Clinics in Government Hospitals
- Cancer treatment centres including National Cancer Institute Sri Lanka (Apeksha Hospital)
- Palliative care clinics

Other Services Available Internationally

- Cancer counselling and psychological support
- Cancer survivor support groups
- Stoma care services
- Nutrition and rehabilitation programmes
- Home-based palliative care services

The age of onset is becoming below 50 years.

Newly onset changes in bowel habits (Diarrhoea & constipation) lasting for more than 3 weeks, blood in stools needs to be immediately seen by a qualified Medical Officer.

Constipation & blood in stools may be an early symptom of colorectal cancer and not always due to haemorrhoids/ piles.

Contact Details

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Cancer Early Detection Centre

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