

Colorectal Cancer: Understanding the Disease, Symptoms, and Screening Importance

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Introduction

Colorectal cancer is a prevalent and potentially life-threatening disease that affects the colon or rectum, which are crucial parts of the digestive system. It is the third most common cancer worldwide, accounting for a significant number of cancer-related deaths. Colorectal cancer can develop slowly over several years, often beginning as benign growths called polyps that can become cancerous over time. However, with early detection and appropriate treatment, the chances of successful outcomes significantly increase. Colorectal cancer often presents with subtle or nonspecific symptoms, making it essential to recognize the warning signs and seek medical attention promptly. Common symptoms may include changes in bowel habits, rectal bleeding, abdominal pain or discomfort, unexplained weight loss, fatigue, and anemia. However, it is crucial to note that some individuals may experience no symptoms at all, further highlighting the significance of routine screening [1].

Description

Colorectal cancer is a malignant tumor that develops in the colon or rectum, which are parts of the digestive system. It typically begins as benign growths called polyps, which can become cancerous over time. Colorectal cancer is one of the most common types of cancer and can affect both men and women. Understanding its nature and progression is essential for effective management and prevention. Persistent changes in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or a feeling of incomplete evacuation. Blood in the stool, either bright red or dark in color, which may be visible or only detected through a fecal occult blood test. Generalized fatigue and weakness that do not improve with rest. Low red blood cell count due to chronic blood loss, resulting in fatigue, weakness, and pale skin [2,3].

To diagnose bowel inflammation regular screening plays a critical role in identifying colorectal cancer at its early stages when treatment is more effective and chances of survival are higher. Screening can help prevent colorectal cancer-related deaths by detecting precancerous polyps or early-stage cancer that can be removed or treated before they progress. This procedure involves a thorough examination of the entire colon using a flexible tube with a camera. It allows for the detection and removal of polyps and the evaluation of abnormal areas. Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) test detects tiny amounts of blood in the stool, which may indicate the presence of polyps or cancerous growths. Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) detects blood in the stool but specifically targets human blood from the lower digestive tract [4]. Stool DNA Test (SDA) detects genetic material associated with colorectal cancer or precancerous polyps. Screening for colorectal cancer is generally recommended to start at age 50 for individuals with average risk. The preferred screening method may vary based on individual factors and preferences. High-Risk Individuals with a family history of colorectal cancer or certain genetic conditions may need to start screening

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Received: 02 May, 2023, Manuscript No. jibdd-23-105079; **Editor Assigned:** 04 May, 2023, PreQC No. P-105079; **Reviewed:** 18 May, 2023, QC No. Q-105079; **Revised:** 23 May, 2023, Manuscript No. R-105079; **Published:** 30 May, 2023, DOI: 10.37421/2476-1958.2023.08.180

earlier and undergo more frequent or specific tests. Consuming a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins while limiting red and processed meats may lower the risk of colorectal cancer. Engaging in regular exercise can help maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of colorectal cancer [5].

Conclusion

Colorectal cancer is a significant health concern, but with increased awareness and emphasis on screening, its impact can be reduced. Recognizing the common symptoms and understanding the importance of early detection through screening are crucial steps in managing and preventing this disease. By promoting a healthy lifestyle, adhering to recommended screening guidelines, and seeking regular medical care, individuals can take proactive measures to detect colorectal cancer in its early stages when treatment outcomes are most favorable. Together, we can strive to reduce the burden of colorectal cancer and improve overall health and well-being.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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How to cite this article: Lin, Kamel. "Colorectal Cancer: Understanding the Disease, Symptoms, and Screening Importance." *J Inflamm Bowel Dis* 8 (2023): 180