



## Colorectal Cancer Disease Overview

- Colorectal cancer is a term used for cancer that starts in the colon or the rectum. They can be referred to separately as colon cancer or rectal cancer, depending on where they start, and they have many features in common.
- Most colorectal cancers develop slowly over several years. A growth of tissue or tumor usually begins as a non-cancerous polyp on the inner lining of the colon or rectum. A tumor is abnormal tissue and can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). The chance of changing into a cancer depends on the kind of polyp. There are two (2) main types:
  - 1) Adenomatous polyps (adenomas) can change into cancer. Because of this, adenomas are called a *pre-cancerous condition*.
  - 2) Hyperplastic polyps and inflammatory polyps, in general, are not pre-cancerous. But some doctors think that some hyperplastic polyps can become pre-cancerous or have a greater risk of developing adenomas and cancer, particularly when these polyps grow in the ascending colon.

Another condition possibly leading to colorectal cancer is Dysplasia, where an area of the lining of the rectum or colon appears abnormal, but polyps are not present. It is usually seen in people who have had diseases such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease for many years.

- Approximately 95% of colorectal cancers are Adenocarcinomas. These begin in the glands that make mucus to lubricate the inside of the colon and rectum. When doctors talk about colorectal cancer, this is almost always to what they are referring.
- Less common tumors that start in the colon and rectum are: Carcinoid Tumors, Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumors (GISTs), Lymphomas and Sarcomas.

