

## Rebecca Baucom, M.D.

### What is colorectal cancer?

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Colorectal Cancer globally refers to a group of cancers that develop on the lining of the gastrointestinal tract in the lower GI tract or the large intestine. And they typically start as a polyp. And as that polyp grows over a period of years, it can develop mutations and changes that allow it to become invasive. And so a cancer is one of those polyps that has become invasive into the wall of either the colon or the rectum. And we refer to them separately because they get treated a little bit differently whether the cancer is in the colon or whether the cancer is in the rectum. And the rectum refers to just the very, very lowest end of the GI tract, the last nine inches or so of the GI tract. And that really becomes most important because the prognosis varies a little bit, whether it's colon versus rectal, and most importantly, the treatment options. And the order of treatment varies whether it's colon or rectal.

### How many people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer and what are the survival rates?

1:15

So every year in the United States, approximately 150 to 160,000 people are diagnosed with colorectal cancer every year, and about 50,000 of those are expected to die within the year of colorectal cancer. And it is very common, it's the third most common cancer diagnosis for both men and women in the United States.

### At what age should we start testing and why is it so important?

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The preventive and detection measures are important. Specifically, because in colorectal cancer, we actually have the opportunity to not just screen for and look for a cancer that is already there. But we have the opportunity to potentially prevent something from ever turning into a cancer. So like I mentioned earlier, all cancers generally start as a polyp in the colon. And when we perform a colonoscopy, or other types of screening modalities, our goal is to try to detect those polyps and then to remove the polyp. And so if we remove the polyp, we have the opportunity to prevent that from ever forming into a cancer. And just recently, within the last several years, the guidelines for screening colonoscopy and recommended screening age for even non invasive testing has decreased to age 45. Previously, it was age 50, we are starting to see the incidence of colorectal cancer increase in younger and younger patients. And so the recommended screening age for average risk individuals is now 45. There are things that increase a certain patient's risk for colorectal cancer and in those patients they sometimes need to get screened earlier. For instance, patients who have a family history of colorectal cancer in their immediate family.

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### What are the symptoms of colorectal cancer?

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Many times Colorectal cancer is asymptomatic until it grows to a very large size. But some of the symptoms that if a patient does develop symptoms, those can include a change in their typical bowel function. Or noticing blood in their stools or blood when they wipe can also develop certain abdominal discomfort or pain after eating constipation, diarrhea, all of those can be kind of subtle symptoms of colorectal cancer, but many are not symptomatic at all.