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**PALM BEACH**  
**GASTROENTEROLOGY**  
**CONSULTANTS, LLC**

KRISHNA TRIPURANENI, MD  
THOMAS J. FLANNERY, MD  
VIKRAM TARUGU, MD

**COLORECTAL CANCER**  
**SCREENING**

1157 South State Road 7  
Wellington, FL 33414  
Phone: (561) 795-3330  
Fax: (561) 795-1030

1200 South Main Street, Suite 102  
Belle Glade, FL 33430  
Phone (561) 996-5600  
Fax: (561) 992-0928

[www.wellingtongastroenterology.com](http://www.wellingtongastroenterology.com)

**SCREENING PUTS TIME ON  
YOUR SIDE**

According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer (cancer in the colon or rectum) is the second most common cause of cancer in the United States. But it doesn't have to be. When the cancer is found and removed early, the chances of a full recovery are very good. Because colorectal cancer rarely causes symptoms in its early stages, screening for the disease is important. It's even more crucial if you have risk factors. Then talk to your doctor about being screened. You could be saving your own life.

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

Colorectal cancer often doesn't cause symptoms until the disease is advanced. Signs and symptoms of this cancer include:

- Pain in the abdomen or rectum
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Changes in bowel habits lasting a week or longer
- Tiredness (fatigue)

**RISK FACTORS**

Your risk of having colorectal cancer increase if you:

- Are 50 years of age or older
- Have a family history of colorectal cancer
- Have a personal history of colorectal polyps
- Have a personal history of cancer
- Have ulcerative colitis

**THE COLON AND RECTUM**

Waste from food you eat enters the colon from the small intestine. As it travels through the colon, the waste (stool) loses water and becomes more solid. Intestinal muscles push it toward the sigmoid- the last section of the colon. Stool then moves into the rectum, where it's stored until it's ready to leave the body during a bowel movement.



## HOW CANCER DEVELOPS

Polyps are growths that form on the lining of the colon or rectum. Most are benign, which means they are not cancerous. But over time, polyps can become malignant (cancerous). This occurs when cells in these polyps begin growing abnormally. In time, malignant cells begin growing abnormally. In time, malignant cells invade more and more of the colon and rectum. The cancer may also spread to nearby organs or lymph nodes or to other parts of the body. Finding and removing the polyps can help prevent cancer from forming.

## YOUR SCREENING

Screening means looking for a medical problem before you ever have symptoms. During your screening for colorectal cancer, your doctor will ask about your family medical history, examine you, and do the following test described below.

## MEDICAL HISTORY

Your doctor will ask about your medical history. Mention if a family member has had colon cancer or polyps. Also mention any health problems you have had in the past.

## COLONOSCOPY

A colonoscopy is the best test doctors have for finding and removing colorectal polyps. The day before the test, you will do a bowel prep to cleanse your colon. You will be given instruction for this. Just before the test, you are given a medication to make you sleepy. Then, a

long flexible, lighted tube called a colonoscope is gently inserted into the rectum and guided through the entire colon. Images of the colon are viewed on a video screen. Any polyps that are found are removed and sent to a lab for testing. If a polyp cannot be removed, a sample of tissue is taken and the polyp is removed later during surgery. A variation of this test, called virtual colonoscopy, may be an option. Your doctor can tell you more.

## WHEN YOU CALL YOUR DOCTOR FOR A TEST

Call your doctor if you have any of the following after a screening test:

- Bleeding
- Fever over 101°F (38.3°C)
- Abdominal pain

## LOOKING AHEAD

Keep your colorectal health in mind as you live your life. Eating foods that are high in fiber and low in animal fat and getting regular exercise help protect against cancer. See your doctor for screening as often as recommended. Talk to your family about screening, too. Prevention is important for everyone.

