

You have been diagnosed with a tumour (cancer) in your large bowel (colon). This is not quite the same as a rectal cancer (cancer of the back passage)

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about the cancer.

What is a cancer of the colon?

The tissues and organs of the body are made up of cells. Cells age and become damaged and need to repair and reproduce themselves continuously. When this process gets out of control, the cells reproduce and multiply to form an abnormal mass (or tumour).

Tumours can be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancer). A malignant tumour consists of cancer cells that can spread to other organs in the body.

What causes a colon cancer to happen?

It is not known what causes tumours to grow.

Unfortunately, colon tumours are fairly common. They often arise from a polyp, which starts as benign tissue and over a period of time can then turn cancerous. Although colon cancers are slightly more common in people who smoke and who do not eat a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, most colon cancers arise without any particular cause being known. Very occasionally, colon cancers can run in families but this is NOT very often. If caught early enough, many colon cancers can be cured.

What will happen now?

You will be given information about your treatment and plans. To help us decide how to treat the cancer it is very important that we get the necessary information about the cancer and the rest of the body. We call this gathering of information 'STAGING' the cancer. This may involve several tests which you will be told about.

Tests which may be done include:

- Colonoscopy

If you have not already had this test or a barium Xray, a colonoscopy may be done. This is a flexible endoscopy where a telescope is passed through the rectum into the large bowel to examine it for abnormalities. This is done with sedation. It helps us check that the other parts of the large bowel are normal and gives us a clear idea of what the tumour is like

- CT scan

A CT (CAT) scan is a painless, detailed x-ray examination of the body. It is done to look for obvious abnormalities elsewhere in your body and in particular to see if there is any evidence that the cancer may have spread.

How is colon cancer treated?

- Surgery

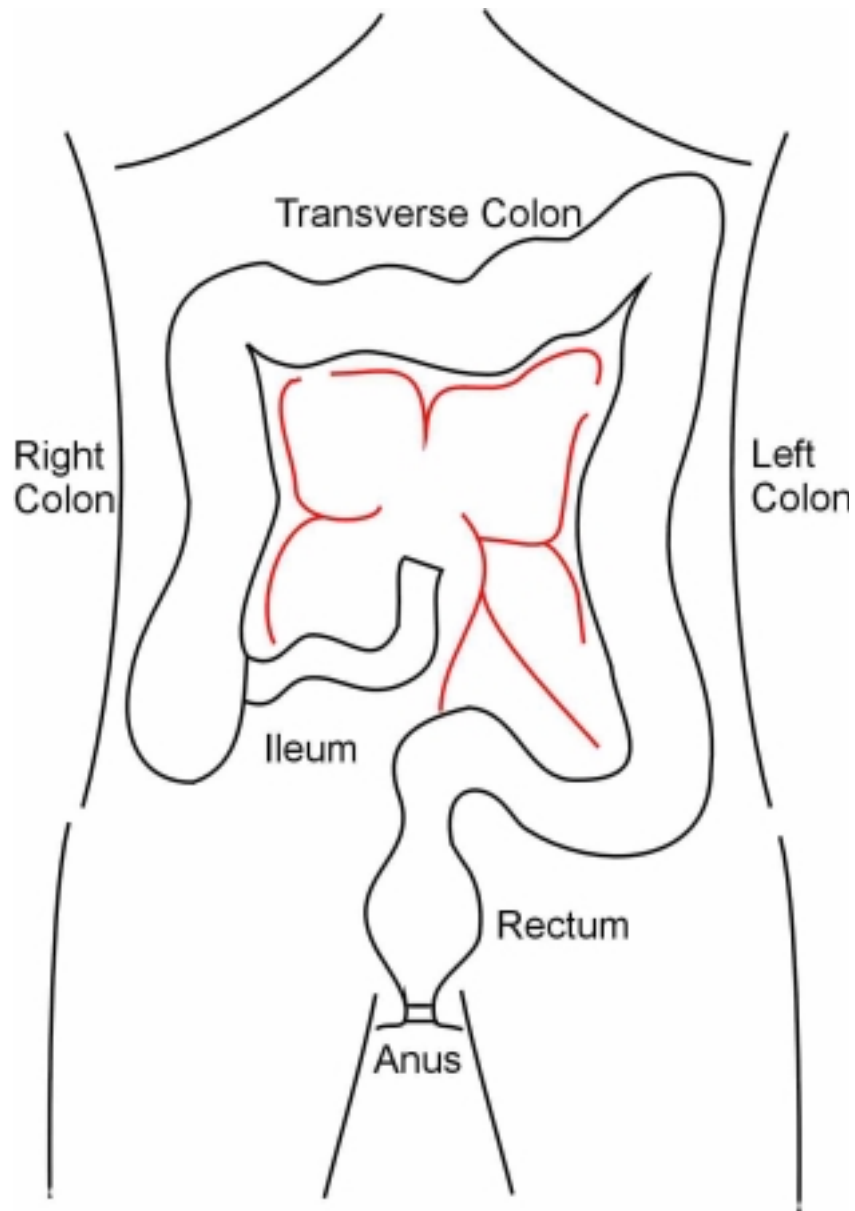
Colon cancer is often treated by an operation to try to remove the section of the bowel containing the cancer as well as all its lymph glands and blood vessels. If this is not possible or not sensible then this will be explained to you and the other possible treatment options can be discussed.

Will I need radiotherapy or chemotherapy?

It is very unusual to give radiotherapy for colon cancer and almost never before an operation is done.

Chemotherapy is used for some patients with colon cancer but NOT all. For patients where the cancer appears suitable for surgery, an operation is usually performed. Chemotherapy MAY be considered as an extra treatment after the operation but this usually depends on the appearances of the cancer under the microscope. For many patients the surgery alone is adequate treatment to aim for a cure.

If surgery is planned for you, you will normally be given a booklet explaining about your particular operation



A Patient's guide to
Colon Cancer

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