



SENTARA CANCER NETWORK

COMPREHENSIVE COLORECTAL CANCER PROGRAM

The Sentara Cancer Network is dedicated to providing a compassionate and personalized approach to the diagnosis and treatment of colorectal cancer. From education and prevention to leading-edge treatments, patients benefit from the wide range of services offered through our Comprehensive Colorectal Cancer Program, including:

- Individualized treatment plans
- Multidisciplinary care team of colorectal specialists
- Minimally-invasive techniques and advanced technology
- Genetic counseling for accurate diagnosis and treatment

Wherever you are in your journey, our Comprehensive Colorectal Cancer Program is here to be a strong partner in your fight and ensure you receive high-quality and timely care.



To learn more visit [sentaracancer.com](https://www.sentaracancer.com).



SENTARA®

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Dr. FitzHarris consulting a patient.

Nearly 50,000 women are diagnosed with colon cancer each year. If doctors diagnose colon cancer early, the odds of beating it can be as high as 90 percent. To catch it at the earliest possible stage, you need to know what to look for, assess your risk factors and get the right screenings.

COLON CANCER SIGNS WOMEN SHOULDN'T IGNORE

"People often misinterpret possible signs of colon cancer as menstrual issues or irritable bowel syndrome," says Sherry A. Scheib, M.D., an internal medicine specialist at Sentara. These symptoms could include abdominal bloating, cramping or lower abdominal pain.

BLOOD IN THE STOOL

Women and their doctors often dismiss even the most serious warning sign of colon cancer – blood in the stool. "If you have a history of hemorrhoids because of childbirth, you might assume the blood is due to hemorrhoids," says Dr. Scheib.

But if you see blood in your stool – especially if you have no other signs of hemorrhoids – talk to your doctor.

ANEMIA

Anemia, a condition in which the blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate oxygen throughout the body, is another problem that's common among women and can also be an early warning sign of colon cancer. In younger women, heavy periods may cause anemia.

"But if you are anemic and your gynecologist can't explain it based on your periods, talk to your doctor about colon cancer screening," says Gregory FitzHarris, M.D., a colorectal surgeon at Sentara.

WHEN TO GET SCREENED

According to the American Cancer Society:

- **If you have no family history of colon cancer:** Your first colonoscopy should be at age 45.
- **If you have a first-degree relative (parent or sibling) with colon cancer:** Begin testing when you are 10 years younger than your relative was at the time of diagnosis. If your mom was diagnosed at age 50, you should start screenings at age 40.

Regardless of your age or family history, talk to your doctor about further evaluation and screening if you experience:

- Unexplained rectal bleeding
- Change in bowel habits (persistent diarrhea or constipation)
- Narrower than normal stools

SCREENING IS THE KEY TO EARLY DETECTION

"Colonoscopy is still the gold standard for colon cancer screening," says Dr. FitzHarris. "Not only does it detect cancer, but it can also remove precancerous polyps."

Other, less invasive tests may be an option for anyone who can't get a colonoscopy. These kits allow you to collect a stool sample at home and then ship it to a lab. These tests include:

- **FIT:** The fecal immunochemical test checks for hidden blood in the stool.
- **Cologuard®:** The test detects genes shed from colon cancer as well as blood from the colon and rectum.

"These tests are preferable to no screening at all," says Dr. Scheib. Both look for blood in the stool.

SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST

A diagnosis of colon cancer is life-changing for patients and their loved ones. Nobody understands this more than the care teams at the Sentara Cancer Network. Our experts dedicate their professional lives to providing exceptional care that extends the longevity and quality of life for everyone touched by cancer. The Sentara difference will make all the difference for you.