

Glossary

There are some terms you may come across on the CCSC website, or during screening and/or diagnostic tests, or if you have been diagnosed with colon cancer, which may not be familiar to you. We have created a comprehensive list below to explain what these words and terms mean.

Abnormal tissue

A group of cells that may look and/or behave differently from normal cells. Abnormal tissue may already be cancerous or may develop into cancerous tissue.

Adenocarcinomas

Cancers that begin in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids.

Anus

The opening of the rectum through which stool passes to the outside of the body.

Benign

(Pronounce: Beh-NINE) – Not cancerous. Benign tumors may grow larger but do not spread to other parts of the body. Also referred to as malignant.

Biopsy

(Pronounce: BY-op-see) - The removal of a tissue sample for diagnosis purposes. When a doctor biopsies a colon polyp, either a small portion or the entire polyp is sent to a lab where it will be determined to be cancerous or non-cancerous.

Body mass index (BMI)

A method to find the relationship of a person's weight to their height. It is often used to classify an individual as underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese. The calculation is weight (in kilograms) divided by the square of the height (in meters).

Bowel

(Pronounce: BOW-ul) - Another term for intestine. Made up of the small and large intestine, this long tubular structure is responsible for breaking down food and

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transporting food components and water into the bloodstream. The term 'bowel cancer' refers to the large intestine only.

Bowel Cancer

See "Colon Cancer".

Bowel Preparation

The colon needs to be clear prior to a colonoscopy to get accurate results. Preparation for a colonoscopy includes changing your diet and medications for three to seven days before the test. An instruction sheet will be provided and it is crucial that these preparation instructions are followed.

Cancer

A disease where abnormal cells begin to multiply uncontrollably and form a mass of cells, or tumor. Cancer cells can also leave their place of origin and travel through the blood stream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body. This movement is called metastasis. Traveling cancer cells can form new tumors in other parts of the body.

Colon

Another term for the large intestine. It is the tubular organ that connects the small intestine to the rectum. It is responsible for water uptake into the blood stream and transport of undigested waste (stool or feces) to the rectum for temporary storage.

Colon Cancer

Cancer that forms in the tissues of the colon (the longest part of the large intestine). Most colon cancers are adenocarcinomas (cancers that begin in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids).

Colonoscopy

(Pronounce: KOH-luh-NOS-koh-pee) - Examination of the inner lining of the colon using a long, flexible tube-like instrument called a colonoscope. Polyps and colon cancers can be located and possibly removed during a colonoscopy.

Computed Tomography (CT) Scan

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(Pronounce: kum-PYOO-ted toh-MAH-gruh-fee skan) - A series of x-ray images are taken and combined using computer software. The result is a 3-D image of the body part being scanned.

Constipation

Infrequent, painful, and hard to pass stools. Constipation may be the result of a lack of fibre in the diet, medication, inflammatory bowel disease, colon cancer, or it may be caused by something else.

Crohn's disease

An inflammatory disease of the digestive tract. It mostly affects the small intestine but may also affect the large intestine. Ulcers or sores develop on the inner lining of the intestine. Patients' symptoms range from relatively no symptoms to severe cramping, diarrhea, and blood in the stool.

CT colonography

(Pronounce:CT KOH-luh-NOG-rah-fee) - A virtual colonoscopy technique that uses a CT scanner. See virtual colonoscopy.

Diarrhea

Frequent, watery bowel movements.

Diverticulosis

(Pronounce:DY-vur-TIK-yoo-LOH-siss) - Medical condition in which little sacs or out-pouchings, called diverticula, develop in the wall of the colon. These pockets can be a source of blood in the stool.

The diverticulum is formed by the inner lining of the colon protruding through to the muscle layer. Diverticulosis is very common as people get older. In most cases diverticula do not causes any symptoms or problems; affecting over 50 percent of those over age 60 and affecting both men and women.

Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)

(Pronounce: fa-MI-lee-yul ad-eh-NOM'ah-tus pah-li-PO-sis) – A genetic condition where hundreds to thousands of polyps form on the digestive tract lining, most commonly in the colon and rectum. FAP is due to a gene abnormality that one is born with.

Family history

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For medical purposes, a family history includes medical information about the blood relatives of an individual. Usually, the medical history of first degree relatives (parents, siblings, and children) is important information for estimating an individual's risk of developing a disease such as colon cancer.

Fatigue

A feeling of tiredness, weakness, and reduced performance that does not go away after a period of rest. Fatigue can be temporary (acute) or long-lasting (chronic). Although there are many causes, fatigue can be a symptom of cancer and a side effect of some forms of cancer treatment.

Fecal DNA test

A test that examines stool samples for the DNA markers of precancerous and cancerous tumors located in the colon and rectum. This test is not widely available as it is still in the research phase.

Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)

(Pronounce: FEE-kul uh-KULT) – See the Home Stool Test. Also often referred to as the FIT.

Feces

(Pronounce: FEE-seez) - A form of waste that is made up of mostly undigested food material that leaves the body through the anus. (See also stool)

FOBT

See "Fecal occult blood test".

FIT

Fecal Immunochemical Test. Also may be referred to as the Home Stool Test. See "Fecal occult blood test".

Gastroenterologist

(Pronounce: GAS-troh-EN-teh-RAH-loh-jist) - A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating disorders related to the digestive system (esophagus, stomach, intestines, and rectum).

Gastrointestinal cancer

A form of cancer that develops in the digestive tract (esophagus, stomach, intestines, and rectum).

Grade

In terms of cancer, grade is a classification system for tumors. The grade of a tumor is based on several characteristics that vary depending on the type of cancer, and is a useful way to describe the likelihood of the tumor growing and spreading. The grade of a tumor and the stage of a cancer is not the same thing.

Hemorrhoids

(Pronounce: HEH-muh-ROYDS) - Enlarged veins around the anus and rectum area that can cause an itching and burning sensation. They may be internal or external (protruding out of the anus). They can be a source of blood in the stool.

Hereditary nonpolyposis Colon cancer (HNPCC)

(Pronounce: huh-REH-dih-TAYR-ee NON-PAH-lee-POH-sis KOH-loh-REK-tul KAN-ser) - A rare genetic disorder that increases one's risk of developing colon cancer. This is an uncommon condition that causes about two to three percent of all colon cancers that begin at a young age.

Home Stool Test

A painless test that can detect blood hidden in stool samples. Using a special kit, this test is usually done at home to detect blood hidden in three consecutive bowel movements. It is also referred to often as the FOBT and the FIT test.

Inflammatory bowel disease

(Pronounce: in-FLAM-uh-tawr-ee BOW-ul disease) - Occurs when the part of the large intestine is inflamed (red, swollen, painful) for a long period of time. Inflammatory bowel disease is a term that describes more than one condition (ex – Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis).

Lab requisition

A doctor's written request for a patient to have specific medical lab work completed.

Laxative

A substance that promotes bowel movements. Laxatives are often used to treat constipation or as a way to empty the colon before a colonoscopy.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

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(Pronounce: mag-NEH-tik REH-zuh-nunts IH-muh-jing) - A technique that uses radio waves and computer software to create detailed images of parts inside the body.

Malignant

(Pronounce: muh-LIG-nunt) – Cancerous. Malignant cells can invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body

Metastasis

(Pronounce: meh-TAS-tuh-sis) - The movement of cancer cells from original tumor to other body parts, usually through the lymphatic system or through blood vessels. This is the way that cancer spreads within the body.

Non-invasive

Screening methods that do not require penetration of a body cavity or breaking of the skin.

Perforation

In a colonoscopy, a perforation can occur if the scope punctures the wall of the colon. This is a serious health concern, as waste material can exit the colon through this hole and leak into the body surrounding it.

Polyps

(Pronounce: PAH-lips) - A mass of cells that grow up and out of the inner lining of hollow organs like the colon and rectum. Polyps are not always cancerous, but some may become cancerous if they are not detected and removed. Of the four types of colon polyps that occur in the colon, two are the most common. These are the adenomatous and hyperplastic polyps.

- **Inflammatory:** This is most common in patients with ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease. These are often called pseudopolyps or false polyps as they are a reaction to chronic inflammation of the colon wall. They are not cancerous.
- **Hyperplastic:** A hyperplastic polyp is usually smaller in size and found in the rectum. These polyps cannot be distinguished on appearance during a colonoscopy, and may have to be biopsied for microscopic examination. These are considered low risk for cancer as they have little chance of becoming malignant.

- Tubular adenoma or adenomatous polyp: Tubular adenoma is the most common. Seventy percent of all polyps removed are this type. They are a definite cancer risk. The risk increases with the growth of the polyps. Adenomatous polyps have no symptoms. However, if detected early they can be removed during colonoscopy before they become cancerous. Polyps grow slowly and may take years to turn cancerous. Patients with a history of adenomatous polyps should ensure that they regularly undergo examination to track their growth.
- Villous adenoma or tubulovillous adenoma: Villous adenoma is a more serious type of polyp and has a very high risk of cancer as it grows larger. They are often large in size and sessile. Sessile means that the main body of the polyp is attached to the inside wall of the colon instead of being attached on a 'stalk.' This makes removal of the polyps more difficult. Usually the smaller ones can be removed over several colonoscopies. But large ones may require surgery for complete removal. Follow-up may be required depending upon the size and completeness of removal.

Polypectomy

(Pronounce: PAH-LEE-PEK-toh-mee)

Surgery to remove a polyp.

Population-based screening

A screening program designed for an entire population as a routine part of their health care. Example screening tests include mammography, cervical pap test, colonoscopy, and fecal occult blood test (FOBT).

Precancerous polyp

See also Adenomatous polyps. A polyp that has not yet become cancerous but has the potential to become cancerous. In other words, these cells do not have the ability to move to other parts of the body in a process called metastasis.

Rectum

The final portion of the large intestine where stool is stored until the next bowel movement.

Risk Factor

Something that increases an individual's chance of developing a disease, such as family history or certain lifestyle choices.

Scope

An instrument used to aid in viewing something. A colonoscope is a small camera on the end of a long, thin, flexible tube that doctors use to view the inner lining of the large intestine.

Screening

Looking for a disease in people that do not have any symptoms.

Example screening tests include mammography, cervical pap test, colonoscopy, and fecal occult blood test (FOBT).

Sedative

Medicine that is used to calm, relax, and relieve anxiety. Sedatives often cause patients to become sleepy, and are thus also used as a sleep aid.

Small intestine

The part of the digestive tract that connects the stomach and the large intestine. In the small intestine, food gets broken down into smaller components and passed into the blood stream. Food material that does not get broken down and passed into the blood travels to the large intestine.

Stool

A form of waste that is made up of mostly undigested food material that leaves the body through the anus. (See also feces)

Symptoms

Changes in the body or its functions that may indicate the presence of disease. People with any type of symptoms need to seek medical advice to determine the cause.

Tumor

A mass of cells that result when abnormal cells begin to multiply uncontrollably. Tumors can be either cancerous or non-cancerous.

Ulcerative colitis

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(Pronounce: UL-sur-ay-tuv koh-LY-tis) - One of the diseases classified as inflammatory bowel disease. Symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhea, blood in the stool, and strong urges to have a bowel movement.

Ulcers

Damage that causes a sore or break in the inner lining of the digestive tract.

Virtual Colography

A technique designed to look at the entire colon using a CT or MRI scanner and computer imaging instead of inserting a colonoscope into the rectum and colon. Also called virtual colonoscopy.

Virtual Colonoscopy

A technique designed to look at the entire colon using a CT or MRI scanner and computer imaging instead of inserting a colonoscope into the rectum and colon. Also called virtual colography.

Sources:

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