

Irritable Bowel Syndrome and the Risk of Colorectal Cancer.

Source: *British Journal of Cancer*

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is one of the most common gastrointestinal disorders that physicians treat. Patients with this non-life-threatening condition may present with a broad range of symptoms which typically include abdominal pain associated with altered bowel habits, including constipation, diarrhea, or alternating constipation and diarrhea, and a less common presentation of painless diarrhea. Although the symptoms are typically intermittent, they may be continuous and should be present for at least three months before the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome is considered.

Colorectal cancer, also called colon cancer or large bowel cancer or rectal cancer, includes cancerous growths in the colon, rectum and appendix. With 655,000 deaths worldwide per year, it is the third most common form of cancer and the second leading cause of cancer-related death in the Western world. In the United States, it is the fourth most common cancer in men and women. Caught early, it is often curable. It is more common in people over 50, and the risk increases with age.

A recent study published in the *British Journal of Cancer* investigated the risk of colorectal cancer among people with irritable bowel syndrome. The study included people with first-time hospital contact for IBS who were then followed to determine how many developed colorectal cancer. A total of 57,851 patients were identified as having IBS and among those patients, 407 cases of colon cancer and 115 cases of rectal cancer were identified during the follow-up period. It was found that within the first three months of receiving an IBS diagnosis the risk of colon cancer was increased more than eight-fold and the risk of being diagnosed with rectal cancer was increased five-fold. It was then discovered that there was actually a decreased risk of colorectal cancer in the period between one and ten years following a diagnosis of IBS. It seems that the increased risk of colorectal cancer shortly after an IBS diagnosis may be explained by diagnostic confusion due to overlapping symptoms between the two conditions. Therefore, there does not appear to be an increased risk of colorectal cancer due to IBS.¹

¹ Norgaard M, Farkas DK, Pedersen L, et al. Irritable bowel syndrome and risk of colorectal cancer: a Danish nationwide cohort study. *Br J Cancer*. Feb2011.