BioSpect
the business of Bi
24 years of leveraging the business of Bio
www.biospectrumindia.co

Identifying the signs of colorectal conditions early

13 December 2019 | Views | By Dr. Vivek Belathur

Colorectal diseases comprise a broad variety of conditions



The Colon and the Rectum are key parts of the human large intestine. Together, they form the bowels and are responsible for processing liquid waste and residue into solid form and expelling this waste from the body. The colon and rectum are part of the digestive system and as components of the large intestine, play a central role in separating waste from useful nutrients in the food we consume. Ailments that affect the colon and rectum are known as **colorectal conditions** and require immediate medical attention as they interfere with the digestive and excretory processes of the human body. If colorectal conditions are left unaddressed they can worsen and result in a build-up of waste in the bloodstream as it is not being removed from the body. This, in turn, can affect the functioning of other vital systems such as the respiratory and circulation systems.

Why are colorectal conditions difficult to identify?

Colorectal diseases comprise a broad variety of conditions which can range from mildly irritating such as **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)** and **Hemorrhoids** to life-threatening, such as **Colorectal Cancer** and **Ulcerative Colitis.** The primary obstacle in identifying colorectal conditions is that the symptoms and indications do not reveal themselves and arise until the issue **has already developed to a certain extent**. This is unlike conditions affecting other systems of the human body, where the symptoms arise during the early stages of a condition and indicate a problem which is developing rather than already developed.

The symptoms of colorectal conditions contribute to the overall difficulty as well. Colorectal cancer is a prime example. According to NCBI, it is **the third most common cancer** in the world and the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths, but during the early stages the symptoms range from a stomach ache to irregular bowel movements and a changed bowel schedule. These symptoms are easily mistaken for a relatively minor condition such as indigestion or sickness. By the time the true cause is identified, the condition has developed to a complex stage.

Sometimes, the symptoms of colon and rectum can be confused with other less significant symptoms like irritable bowel syndrome and bowel infections. Although colorectal cancer presents with features of abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhoea and blood in the stool but these classical symptoms are only seen in some patients. Hence, there can be different manifestations and one needs to be aware of it. It is best to get yourself evaluated by an expert incase of any of the smallest symptoms. Beyond the age of 50 or 60, if there are any symptoms which is not relieved with simpler treatments, the intervention of an expert is recommended.

The methods of diagnosing and checking for colorectal conditions often discourage patients from seeking medical help early or going for regular routine checkups. A basic physical examination of the anus by the doctor as well as the more insight providing methods such as a colonoscopy after the age of 50 is very useful as these conditions are developed over a period of 5 to 10 years. This is standard method of screening for detecting colorectal cancers early in its stage.

The symptoms of different colorectal conditions can closely resemble those of other such diseases, creating scope for misdiagnosis and incorrect treatment if the patient attempts to self-diagnose and treat rather than seek medical aid. Patients are strongly advised to seek professional medical attention if they notice any extended periods of discomfort and pain and opt for regular examinations, especially if you are above 45 years of age.

What are the different colorectal conditions and why do they occur?

Any condition which causes discomfort, pain or inflammation in the colon, rectum and interferes with the functioning of the organs is a colorectal condition. The common colorectal ailments are-

- **Colorectal Cancer-** According to NCBI, the third most prevalent cancer in the world is primarily seen in humans above the age of 45. Cancerous tumors and growths which inhibit excretion and waste assimilation are the main components of this condition. The main challenge of colorectal cancer is identifying it early and in time. If diagnosed early, colorectal cancer is completely curable by surgery and does not require radiation therapy. The high death toll is because of the reluctance of patients to get themselves regularly examined and due to misdiagnosis as a result of refusing medical help.

Any symptoms like pain in the abdomen, altered bowel habits in the form of diarrhea, constipation, blood in stool, severe anemia in an elderly person can be a few of the symptoms of colorectal cancer to watch out for and to be significantly evaluated.

The common factor amongst colorectal disorders is that almost all of them are **completely resolvable**; the key is in identifying the signs early and correctly. Majority of the colorectal cancers if diagnosed early, are curable. If left untreated or handled incorrectly, there is a threat of complications. As long as patients maintain a healthy, balanced diet and drink plenty of water while getting regular examinations and checkups, colorectal diseases can be handled with ease and minimal discomfort.

Dr Vivek Belathur, Consultant - Medical Oncology, Fortis Hospitals, Bengaluru