

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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How we treat you depends on several factors, including:

the tumor's size and location

whether it has spread to the lymph nodes or other organs

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Available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Eastern time)

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Treatment Options for Rectal Cancer

Surgery

Surgery is the most common treatment for some stages of rectal cancer. We may combine it with other therapies, such as radiation and chemotherapy, to shrink the tumor. Your care team may use several options, including:

Total neoadjuvant therapy uses a precise combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy to make tumors as small as possible before surgery. Many people tolerate this treatment better before surgery. It may also shorten recovery time. MSK is a leader in developing this treatment method.

MSK has helped pioneer watch-and-wait therapy (also known as nonoperative management) for rectal cancer. Our researchers have demonstrated that for some people with rectal cancer, chemotherapy and radiation may destroy the tumor, eliminating the need for surgery. Because of our doctors' expertise with this method, it has similar long-term results as surgery but with fewer side effects and complications.

If the rectal cancer has spread, surgery may not be the best option. Chemotherapy, sometimes combined with radiation therapy, may allow

treatment to start throughout your entire body without delay.

[Learn more about surgery for rectal cancer.](#)



Rectal Cancer Disappears After Experimental Use of Immunotherapy

Sascha Roth was the first person to join a clinical trial involving immunotherapy for rectal cancer at MSK—and joins 14 others and counting in being cancer-free two years later.

[Learn more](#)

Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy is used mainly to shrink a tumor, often before surgery, and to prevent cancer from coming back after surgery. Some people can have radiation instead of surgery.

[Learn more about radiation therapy for rectal cancer.](#)

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy may be used in combination with radiation before surgery to shrink a tumor or after surgery to kill any remaining cancer cells.

[Learn more about chemotherapy for rectal cancer.](#)

How We Care for You

We offer our patients the most-advanced approaches to surgery, including minimally invasive surgery, which uses smaller incisions (cuts) than traditional surgery. MSK's surgeons are particularly skilled at methods that use a robotic system so they can be even more precise. MSK doctors perform more of these kinds of surgeries than doctors at any other institution in the country. This gives us a high level of expertise that reduces recovery time and leads to fewer complications.

MSK is leading the development of new ways to care for people with rectal cancer, including total neoadjuvant therapy and watch-and-wait therapy. These treatment approaches may make surgery easier or eliminate the need for it altogether.

We understand how important it is to keep your life as normal as possible. One of our key goals is preserving your ability to use the bathroom normally as well as your sexual health.

We treat many people with metastatic rectal cancer. This is cancer that has spread beyond the rectum to other parts of the body. Our colorectal experts work closely with MSK specialists who treat the liver, lungs, and other parts of the body. This gives us unparalleled expertise in treating the most-difficult types of rectal cancer.

Our clinical trials mean that the people we care for have access to the most-advanced treatments.

Our rehabilitation experts help you manage the stress and side effects of rectal cancer and its treatment. We help you heal and stay healthy long after active treatment is done.

Rectal Cancer Experts

MSK doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals are dedicated to caring for people with colorectal cancer. We have experts in surgery, chemotherapy, follow-up care after treatment, and more.

[See all of the rectal cancer experts at MSK.](#)

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