

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month – The Importance of Colorectal Screenings

LOS ALAMITOS, CA – March, 2009 Many baby boomers will turn the big 5-0 this year and even if they aren't ready to sign up for an AARP membership card, they should undergo a colorectal cancer screening. That is because their chances of developing the disease increase considerably after reaching the half century mark. In fact, according to the American Cancer Society, more than 90 percent of colorectal cancer cases are diagnosed in people older than 50.

Other risk factors that may increase a person's chance of developing colorectal cancer include:

- Having a personal history of colorectal polyps or inflammatory bowel disease
- Having a personal or family history of colorectal cancer
- Being African-American or an Ashkenazi Jew
- Eating a diet high in fat
- Being physically inactive
- Obesity
- Smoking and heavy alcohol use
- Type 2 diabetes

People at increased risk for colorectal cancer should talk with their doctor about being screened for the disease before the age of 50. Colorectal cancer may be diagnosed after symptoms appear, but most people with early stage disease will not experience any symptoms.

Colorectal Screenings

There are five different screening tests available to help detect polyps and cancer.

Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)

This test should be performed every year to check for tiny amounts of blood in the stool. The FOBT involves placing a small amount of stool from three consecutive bowel movements on a test card that is then taken to a doctor's office or laboratory for testing.

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

A sigmoidoscopy is an examination that allows the doctor to look inside the rectum and lower (sigmoid) colon for polyps using a narrow, lighted tube called a sigmoidoscope. If any polyps are found during the exam, they can be removed in a procedure called a polypectomy. A sigmoidoscopy is recommended every five years.

Double Contrast Barium Enema

This test, which is also called a lower gastrointestinal (GI) series, involves giving the patient an enema with a barium solution followed by an injection of air into the rectum. A series of X-rays are then taken to show any existing polyps or abnormalities. This test may be necessary every five years.

Colonoscopy

During this procedure, a long, lighted tube, called a colonoscope, is used to look inside the rectum and colon for polyps, suspicious areas, or cancer. Polyps or tissue samples may be removed during a colonoscopy, which is recommended every 10 years^{5d}.

Digital Rectal Exam

During a digital rectal exam (DRE) a doctor or nurse inserts a lubricated, gloved finger into the rectum to feel for abnormal lumps or areas. A DRE may be part of a routine physical examination.

Virtual Colonoscopy

A new screening test called virtual colonoscopy, or CT colonography, may be recommended to detect polyps inside the colon. This procedure involves taking a series of X-rays to generate detailed images of the colon and rectum.

For more information about colorectal cancer screening, talk with your doctor or call 800-548-5559 for a free referral to a specialist near you. Los Alamitos Medical Center has a new \$10 million Cancer Center with sophisticated technology and new equipment. The TotalCare Cancer Center offers advanced radiation treatment and chemotherapy. For a free Cancer Center brochure, call 800-548-5559.