



Colorectal Screening Saves Lives

You look healthy, you feel fine, but you may not be as healthy as you think. You may have colorectal cancer and not even know it. Colorectal cancer, which is cancer that occurs in the colon (i.e., large intestine) or rectum, is the second leading cancer killer of men and women over 50. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), colorectal cancer is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in the U.S. Colorectal cancer affects both men and women, and 93% of colorectal cancer cases are diagnosed in the 50 or older population.

Since in its earliest stages colorectal cancer does not always cause symptoms, you may not know you have it. The only way to know if you have it is by getting screened. Screening tests can find precancerous polyps, which are small growths inside the colon or rectum that may turn into cancer, which need to be removed before turning into cancer.

Because the month of March has been nationally recognized as Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the Southeastern District Health Department would like to remind people 50 and older to get screened, since screening tests are able to find a polyp at its early stage before it has had a chance to develop into cancer. Colorectal cancer is one cancer that can be prevented. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), when colorectal cancer is found early and appropriately treated, survival is greatly enhanced, with a 5-year survival rate of 90%.

The screening tests that are recommended by the American Cancer Society for average risk adults beginning at age 50 are as follows:

- Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) which should be done every year.
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy which should be done every 5 years.
- Double Contrast Barium Enema which should be done every 5 years.
- Colonoscopy which should be done every 10 years.

To determine which screening option is best for you, it is important to discuss it with your doctor. Medicare and many insurance plans will help pay for screening.

Colorectal cancer at times does not show any symptoms, but some of the symptoms that may occur include:

- rectal bleeding,
- stomach cramps,
- weight loss,
- a change in bowel habits,
- or just feeling tired.

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, contact your physician.

To lower the risk for colorectal cancer or any cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends people do the following:

- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week
- Eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruits daily.
- Avoid tobacco, and limit alcohol if you drink at all.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Ask relatives about your family's cancer history

Colon cancer is not a topic that people like to discuss, but we must talk about it and raise awareness on the importance of getting screened.

If you are 50 or older, talk with your doctor about getting screened, it can save your life!

For more information contact Tracy McCulloch, Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Coordinator at the Southeastern District Health Department, at 239-5250 or at www.sdhdidaho.org .