

MARCH IS National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Third most common killer in US is preventable

By Bay Area Gastroenterology

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Each year in the United States, more than 50,000 people die from a disease that is preventable and curable—colorectal cancer. Nearly 140,000 new cases are detected in the US each year. These early cancers produce no symptoms, which is why screening for them is so important.

WHAT IS COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer is a malignant tumor arising from the inner wall of the large intestine, which constitutes the last part of the digestive tract. Most colon cancers arise from polyps, abnormal growths on the wall of the large intestine that can become cancerous over time. If polyps are identified at a very early stage, they can be removed before they become cancerous.

Though most common after age 50, the chances of developing polyps increase after age 40.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR COLORECTAL CANCER?

Contrary to popular myth, women are just as likely as men to develop colon cancer. A pap smear or mammogram is NOT enough to prevent cancer in women.

High Risk Group: Colon cancer screenings must be a priority for persons in this category—those with a family history of colon cancer (first degree relative-parent, sibling or child) or certain chronic conditions like ulcerative colitis.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COLORECTAL CANCER?

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which is why screening is important.

Gastrointestinal bleeding, change in bowel habits, weight loss or abdominal pain are symptoms one should not ignore. Irrespective of your age or family history, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms, please discuss them with your physician.

WHAT IS A SCREENING EXAMINATION?

Medical screening is a test to look for potential problems of a common condition before it becomes serious. The basic principle is to prevent the disease prior to onset of its symptoms and to diagnose it at a curative stage. Common examples include pap smear, mammogram, prostate blood test and, yes, colonoscopy.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT COLORECTAL CANCER?

Colorectal cancer is both preventable and curable. Colorectal cancer is prevented by removing precancerous colon polyps. The National Polyp Study showed in its surveillance program that individuals who had polyps removed experienced a 90% reduction in the incidence of colorectal cancer. Regular screening is the absolute best defense against colorectal cancer.

COLONOSCOPY - PREFERRED SCREENING STRATEGY

Complete colonoscopy is the only screening test that sees the colon directly and allows removal of polyps without surgery. It is the most effective cancer prevention tool and is remarkably safe in the hands of trained and



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skilled endoscopists. Gastroenterologists are physicians with specialized training in endoscopy.

Other methods, like sigmoidoscopy or stool for occult blood, are good preliminary examinations but are not the gold standard for detection of polyps/tumors. CT colography (virtual colonoscopy) and stool DNA tests are available but not approved by insurance companies and in the future may become complementary to colonoscopy. High risk individuals can also be referred for genetic counseling.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Your New Year's resolutions may have come and gone, but you still have March—National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month—to finally make the appointment for your colonoscopy. Both colonoscopy and CT colography are available at the offices of Bay Area Gastroenterology.

If you or your loved one is age 50 or above (the recommended screening age for African Americans is 45), please make an online appointment at www.gibay.com or call 281-480-6264. Videos at www.gibay.tv.

Medicare and most insurance policies cover screening. Virtual colonoscopy is currently approved by select insurance companies and by Medicare under certain situations. ■

IMPORTANT REMINDER: The preceding information is intended only to provide general information. For your particular needs, please consult your doctor.

