Colorectal cancer screening

Overview

Colorectal cancer (or colon cancer, for short) is cancer of the colon, which is the large intestine or large bowel, or rectum, which connects the colon to the anus. It is the third most common cancer among both men and women in the United States — as well as the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

Up to 60% of these deaths, however, could be prevented if all Americans aged 50 and older were regularly screened and diagnosed early.

For example, colorectal cancer frequently develops from precancerous polyps (abnormal growths) in the colon or rectum. Screening tests can find these polyps and remove them before they turn into cancer. Screening can also detect early forms of colorectal cancer, when it's much easier to treat and cure.
Screening recommendations

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends screening for colorectal cancer using high-sensitivity fecal occult blood testing, sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy beginning at age 50 and continuing until age 75.

You may need to start getting screened before age 50, if:
- You or a close relative have a history of colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- You have inflammatory bowel disease.
- You have genetic syndromes such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer.

Please speak with your doctor about when and how often you should be tested — especially if you are at risk or older than 75.

Screening tests

Common screening tests for colorectal cancer are:
- High-sensitivity fecal occult blood test (FOBT). Test checks for hidden blood in three consecutive stool samples; recommended yearly.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy. Doctors use a flexible, lighted tube (sigmoidoscope) to look at the interior walls of the rectum and part of the colon; recommended every five years.
- Colonoscopy. Doctors use a flexible, lighted tube (colonoscope) to look at the interior walls of the rectum and the entire colon; recommended every 10 years. During this procedure, tissue samples may be collected or polyps removed. Colonoscopies can also be used as a diagnostic test when a person has symptoms or as a follow-up test when another screening shows unclear or abnormal results.

Your best defense against colorectal cancer is regular screening and early detection. For more information on colorectal cancer, prevention and testing, talk with your doctor or visit empireblue.com. Also, check out the following sites:

National Cancer Institute: cancer.gov
American Cancer Society: cancer.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov
National Institutes of Health: nih.gov

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov
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