



TAYLOR TIDBITS

SCREENING FOR COLON CANCER SAVES LIVES

March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month. As an internal medicine physician with endoscopy training, I can tell you that in my 20 years of practice, colon cancer screening saves lives. Prevention is our best medicine.

Among cancers that affect both men and women, colon cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. The risk increases with age, with most cases occurring in people over 50 years of age.

The gold standard test to screen for colon cancer is the colonoscopy. This is a procedure that allows the inside of the colon to be examined and allows the physician to remove growths, such as polyps, before they become cancers. Although it is not a perfect test, it can significantly reduce the risk of developing colon cancer.

The current colon cancer screening guidelines recommend a colonoscopy at the age of 50. African Americans should begin at age 45 since their risk of developing colon cancer occurs at an earlier age. Certain other individuals may require an earlier age of screening as well, such as those with a family history of colon cancer, genetic conditions such as familial polyposis, those with a history of inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Also of importance is the fact that certain lifestyle habits increase the risk of colon cancer as well, such as diets high in consumption of red meats and fat, diets low in fiber, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, obesity and low calcium intake.

Colon cancer is the number two cancer killer in the United States, yet it is one of the most preventable types of cancer. It can be prevented not just detected through colonoscopy.

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