Colorectal Cancer Screening Recommendations:

By: Alison Obrien, PA

Colorectal cancer is currently the second most common cancer in the United States for both men and women. An estimated 52,500 Americans died in 2022 from colorectal cancer. Unfortunately, colorectal cancer is increasing in younger populations, particularly in people ages 45-49 years old over the past twenty years; notable because until recently colorectal cancer screening typically began at age 50. In 2022, 11% of colon cancer patients and 15% of rectal cancer patients were under the age of 50.

Risk Factors:

People may be more likely to get colorectal cancer if they previously had colorectal cancer themselves, or someone in their family has. Other risk factors include tobacco and alcohol use, and obesity. Things you can do to protect yourself from colorectal cancer are eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fiber, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and staying physically active. Keeping up to date on regular colorectal cancer screenings can help reduce colorectal cancer death with early detection and prevention via polyp removal.

Screening Methods:

Because of increasing colorectal cancer rates in younger populations, The United States Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer now recommends colon cancer screening starting at age 45 for both men and women. The current standard for screening is a colonoscopy, a procedure able to detect and remove precancerous polyps. Although a colonoscopy is the most effective screening method, there is another less invasive option called Cologuard or FIT testing. This option could be considered for individuals who are considered lower risk. These tests are done by examining a sample of stool for abnormal cells. If abnormal cells are detected, this suggests a risk factor for colorectal cancer is present and a colonoscopy is recommended to complete the screening process.

Survival Rates and next steps:

Survival rates for colorectal cancer are significantly better with early detection of colorectal cancer, so screening tests are very important. In 2021, it was estimated that 2 out 5 adults within screening age are not up to date on colorectal cancer screening. If you or your family members are 45 years or older, it is important to discuss colorectal cancer screening. Selecting the type of screening method should be individualized and include input from a healthcare provider.

What does the future hold for colorectal cancer screening? Researchers are working towards additional noninvasive screening methods for the future such as DNA blood tests which may be available around 2026. For now, colonoscopy or Cologuard/FIT testing are great options. Remember, the best screening method is the one that actually gets completed!

Sources:

1. Swati, Patel et al. *Updates on Age to Start and Stop Colorectal Cancer Screening: Recommendations From the U.S. Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer.* The American Journal of Gastroenterology p 57-65 January 2022.
2. Burke, Carol A et al. *Approach to the use of noninvasive colorectal cancer (CRC) screening options.* Clinical Practice Update American Gastroenterological Association. 01/27/2022.
3. [www.cologuard.com](http://www.cologuard.com)
4. Richardson, Lisa C. MD, MPH. *Adults who have never been screened for colorectal cancer, behavioral risk factor surveillance system, 2012 and 2020.* 04/21/22. [www.cdc.com](http://www.cdc.com)