

Colon & Rectal

Surgical Associates of South Jersey, PA

THE BOTTOM LINE

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March is National colon cancer awareness month

March 2002 marks the third annual **National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month**. This is the continuation of a national effort to raise public awareness about colorectal cancer—the **second** leading cause of cancer deaths among men and women in the United States.

The American Cancer Society estimates that in the USA this year, approximately 148,300 men and women will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 56,600 people will die from the disease. Despite its high incidence, colorectal cancer is one of the most detectable and, if found early, most treatable forms of cancer. Over 90% of those diagnosed while the cancer is still localized survive more than five years. Currently,

however, only 37% of colorectal cancers are detected while still localized.



Because most colorectal cancer develops from polyps (grape-like growths on the lining of the colon and rectum) simple screening methods can detect and remove polyps before they become cancerous.

Despite the widespread availability of these highly effective screening tests, adherence to colorectal screening guidelines lags far behind screening compliance for other cancers, such as breast, cervical, and prostate exams.

Many men and women are unaware that once they turn 50, they should be screened. Men and women who have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps or a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease might need to be screened before age 50. If polyps have been found, then a colonoscopy should be repeated every one to three years (or more frequently) depending upon the type and number of polyps discovered.

Self test for consumers

If you answer “yes” to any of the following questions, talk to your physician about getting screened for colorectal cancer.

- Are you 50 years or older? Although colorectal cancer can strike at any age, more than 9

out of 10 new cases are in people age 50 plus.

- Has any close family member (parent, sibling, or child) had colorectal cancer?
- Has any close family member had polyps?
- Do you have a history of

chronic inflammatory bowel disease such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease?

- Are you experiencing any of the symptoms listed on page 2 of this newsletter?

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**Board Certified
Colon & Rectal Surgeons**

Colorectal Organizations

**Colon Cancer Alliance
(CCA)**

www.CCAAlliance.org

ASCRS

www.fascrs.org

**STOP Colon/Rectal
Cancer Foundation**

www.coloncancerprevention.org

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Colon Cancer Screening Discussion

March 7, 2002 At 7:00 pm

Barry D. Brown Health Education Center
106 Carnie Boulevard
Voorhees, NJ

Eytan Irwin, MD

What is a Colonoscopy?

It is a procedure that allows the doctor to directly inspect the inside of the colon using a long, thin flexible instrument called a colonoscope. Colonoscopy is proven to be the best way to completely view the entire colon and diagnose colon and rectal problems.

A colonoscopy lasts usually 15 to 30 minutes. You receive medication to relax you and make you fall asleep. Discomfort is minimal.

During the procedure, the colonoscope is gently inserted through the rectum up into the colon. The colonoscope is connected to a video camera and video display monitor so the surgeon can closely examine the inside of the colon. A colonoscope is much longer than a sigmoidoscope, so in most cases, it allows the surgeon to see the entire lining of the colon.

Insurance coverage update

Since July 1, 2001, **Medicare** has been reimbursing physicians for screening colonoscopies. Patients who are high risk (a family history of colon cancer) may be screened every two years. Patients who have been determined to be of average risk may be screened once every 10 years. A flexible sigmoidoscopy (an in-office procedure) will be covered once every 4 years for patients deemed of average risk.

Patients with managed care plans and commercial insurance should check their individual policy benefits before scheduling any procedure.

Colorectal cancer symptoms

The following symptoms might indicate colorectal cancer:

- A change in bowel habits
- Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting
- Narrower than normal stools
- Unexplained weight loss
- Constant tiredness
- Unexplained anemia
- Blood in the stool
- Feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Abdominal discomfort

Screening information

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control revealed a study which showed that fewer than 40% of New Jersey adults over the age of 50 have ever had a proctoscopic exam. Surprisingly, 44.5% of males had been screened versus 34.5% of females. This statistic falls short of the 86% of women who were screened for breast cancer.

Some reasons for these low screening rates include:

- Lack of public awareness of colorectal cancer
- Inconsistent promotion of screening by healthcare providers
- Absence of social support for openly discussing and doing something about the "disease down there".

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