



The Risks of Colon Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer will affect about 4% of American women and 4.3% of American men at some point in their life. However, due to increased screenings and improvements in treatment, the number of Americans who die from colorectal cancer has decreased steadily over the last few decades.

To mark National Colon Cancer Awareness Month, which takes place every year in March, CGH Medical Center provides information surrounding colorectal cancer and screenings.

You should always be aware of the potential signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer, including:

- A noticeable change in your regular bowel movements
- Rectal bleeding or blood in your stool
- Discomfort or cramps in your abdomen
- Unexplained weight loss
- General weakness or fatigue

Family history, particularly if there is a first or second degree relative with history of colon cancer, significantly increases the risk of cancer. Smoking and eating a low-fiber diet consisting of a lot of red meat can increase your risk as well. However, even if you don't have these risk factors in your life, everyone is susceptible to colon cancer, and physicians generally recommend colon screenings beginning at age 50. If no issues are found, you should have your next procedure 10 years later. Those between ages 76–85 should ask their physician about how frequent their exams should be.

For some, colon screening comes with preconceptions about the procedure, or even stigmas attached to it. The biggest fear many people have with colonoscopies is the preparation. However, preparations are much gentler now compared to what some have experienced in the past, including less discomfort from the purgative liquid patients have to drink prior to the procedure. And for the actual procedure, patients are sedated so they feel no pain.

All physicians can agree that preventing colon cancer should be top of mind for everyone. How can you reduce your risk of colon cancer? There are three simple ways to improve and stay on top of your colon health: eat healthy, don't smoke and get screened.