

HEALTHY LIVING

Polyp prevention key in colon cancer prevention

By Alison Bailin Batz

Each March, as we observe Colon Cancer Awareness Month in the United States, it is imperative that those at risk — as well as those who love them — educate themselves about prevention, screenings and treatment for this equal opportunity disease.

What is Colon Cancer?

Simply put, colon — or colorectal cancer — is cancer of the colon or rectum. In almost 100% of cases, the cancer starts as a polyp on the colon.

“The word ‘cancer’ itself is actually the general name given to some 100-plus diseases from breast cancer to colon cancer to skin cancer and is when cells in a specific part of the body begin to grow out of control,” said Dr. Murali Murty, a radiation oncologist at Arizona Center for Cancer Care in Deer Valley. “These abnormal cells continue to grow until they invade healthy tissues throughout the body, causing harm and continuing to replicate.”

Who is at risk?

Colon cancer is color blind — meaning all races and ethnicities are at risk. And, while commonly thought to be a disease limited to males, it is just as easy for women to develop. More than 140,000 Americans are diagnosed with this disease every year and more than 50,000 lose their lives as a result.

Additional risks:

- Age — those over 50 are at a greater risk
- Diet — those who are overweight, lacking in fiber and/or overindulging in alcohol are at a greater risk
- Family history — those who have family members diagnosed with the disease are at a higher risk
- Exercise — those who don't get enough



Talk to your doctor about your risk for colon cancer.

exercise on most days of the week are at a higher risk

- Smoking — long-term smoking increases one's risk of nearly every kind of disease on the planet at an exponential rate

But, according to Murty, colon cancer is a disease of survivors — especially with early detection.

“The moment that someone is diagnosed with cancer in any form, they are not considered a patient or victim, but a survivor — we don't let anyone forget that,” said Dr. Murty.

What are the symptoms?

The bad news is that in its earliest — and more treatable stages — there aren't apparent symptoms. “This is the number one reason screening tests are critical,” said Dr. Murty. “When symptoms such as blood in the stool, chronic stomach cramps and unexplained weight loss start to happen, the cancer may have already reached a later stage.”

And, because the above symptoms are common to many everyday ailments, those who get screened don't have to be scared of a stomach ache here and there.

What is the screening process?

Both men and women should have their first colonoscopy by age 50, or earlier if there is a family history of colon cancer or polyps.

The process involves the insertion of a thin tube into one's rectum by a medical professional to check the colon for any polyps or other growths that might be dangerous. The patient is sedated and won't feel a thing.

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