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COLONOSCOPY

Screening is our most powerful weapon for the prevention of colon cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends regular screening or testing for any person with no identified risk factors beginning at age 50. Those with a family history of colon cancer or other known risk factors, should discuss the possibility of having earlier or more frequent exams with their colon-rectal physician. Regular screening may, in fact, prevent colon cancer. Many growths or polyps of the colon may take 10-15 years to develop into a cancer. It is this reason that makes it so important to be diligent in maintaining regular testing. Removal of these growths or polyps will prevent them from becoming colon cancer. Colon cancer is one of the few cancers that can often be prevented following the right precautions.

Diet and exercise play an important part in preventing colon cancer. One should limit intake of red meat and high fat foods and be sure to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. A minimum of 30 minutes, and preferably 45-60 minutes of physical activity daily for five or more days a week is recommended. If you are overweight, you should work on a sensible diet to assist you in returning to your ideal weight.

Colonoscopy is performed under light anesthesia in a hospital or a day surgery unit. The procedure requires a "bowel prep" which your physician will discuss with you. It usually involves not eating and drinking a solution you pick up from the pharmacy, which will be prescribed by your physician. It is important to follow the instructions carefully in order to have an adequate prep to allow your physician to visualize all portions of the bowel. Your physician will discuss the procedure with you prior to your leaving the facility. If a biopsy was taken during the procedure, the results will not be available that day and your physician will tell you when to expect them. After your final diagnosis, your physician will give you his or her recommendation for follow up for additional or repeat testing.

Since some colorectal cancers cannot be prevented, finding them early provides the best means by which to improve the chance of a cure and prevent deaths. Some risk factors cannot be controlled such as having a history of colorectal cancer in your family. Even so, you may be able to prevent colon cancer with early and more frequent surveillance.

If you have a colon-rectal physician, follow his advise for your exams. If you do not have one, we will be happy to assist you in finding a physician to care for your colorectal needs.