

# March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month

*Nancy Kelly, LPN and Health & Wellness Team Member*

It's March! Time to talk turkey with the Gastroenterology Chick! I will try to not bore you with statistics and medical jargon.

Guess what? Colonoscopy is the only cancer screening technique that can **actually prevent cancer**, not just detect it. I have been a gastroenterology nurse for 20 years. One of the biggest concerns people experience about having a colonoscopy is the fear of being embarrassed. I have never heard of a health care professional comment on or joke about a patient during a colonoscopy. No one is interested in seeing your derriere. File that one under the "seen one, seen them all" category. I HAVE seen a wife take her husband's hand and cry upon finding out he has colon cancer. I have had people tell me, "I'm never having that done." Boy, are they misguided! Folks who say that have never seen someone suffering with colon cancer. Colonoscopies save lives. Got that? A 30-minute procedure CAN PREVENT CANCER.



Here is how: get a baseline colonoscopy at age 45. If you are over 45 and not had one, DO IT. Early detection of colon polyps is key. Polyps are small but often precancerous growths in the colon. If your doctor finds polyps (which can only be found during a colonoscopy), they will be removed. With polyps gone, so is cancer risk. If you do not have a colonoscopy, and you have polyps, they most likely will develop in to colon cancer. Sorry, it is true. Colo-Guard, ultrasounds, virtual colonoscopies CANNOT remove polyps.

Now, let's get to the preparation. First, congratulate yourself for scheduling your colonoscopy! Okay, the day before the procedure is no picnic. In fact, it's no food at all. And a kind of yucky, but do-able drink. It is worth ever gulp! The day of the procedure? It is relatively easy and safe. You will be sedated during the procedure and will not feel a thing. You will wake up quickly, feel rested and you can eat as soon as you are discharged.

Want to make it even easier? I will tell you how. Starting now: Eat 30 grams of fiber daily. Fiber helps to keep your bowels moving and keeps your colon healthy. Don't smoke. Do exercise. Easy on the red meat, partner! Doctors do not know exactly what causes colon polyps. Probably poor diet (lack of fiber, too much processed food.) Research shows it could be hereditary, which is why, if you have a family history of colon cancer, you need to be tested earlier than age 45.

To underscore the importance of a screening colonoscopy, consider this: for men and women combined, colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths. More than 51,000 Americans die each year from colon cancer. That's it for statistics!

So, no more excuses. Tell your family practitioner you want a referral for a screening colonoscopy.

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