

# The Importance of Colorectal Cancer Screening and Early Detection

## A Discussion with Dr. Kevin Gaylord



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If you're approaching the mid-century mark or have a family history of colon cancer, you may be aware that colon cancer screening should be in your near future. And if you speak to anyone who has recently had the exam, you may be surprised to find that with the modern sedation used in today's colonoscopy screening, it's a painless procedure and in most cases the patient is home within two hours.

And it's an essential test that could save your life.

### Why Screening Is So Important

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. but one of the most preventable forms of cancer. "Getting a screening colonoscopy – the test used to screen for colorectal abnormalities, cancer and precancerous conditions – reduces mortality due to colon cancer," said Dr. Kevin Gaylord of Hanover Gastroenterology - NHRMC Physician Group.

Adults 50 and over are at greater risk of developing the disease and the risk increases as we age. "Because colorectal cancer often has no symptoms in the early stages of the disease, it's important to get regular screenings beginning at age 50, or sooner if you have family history of colon cancer," said Dr. Gaylord. Screening can find precancerous polyps, which are abnormal growths in the colon or rectum, and remove them before they turn into cancer.

Most colorectal cancers develop slowly over several years. Before cancer develops, a growth of tissue or tumor usually begins as a non-cancerous polyp on the inner lining of the colon or rectum. Some of these polyps have the potential to become cancerous.

Symptoms of colorectal cancer include abdominal pain, changes in bowel habits, and blood in the stool. Iron deficiency anemia and unexplained weight loss may also occur. These symptoms can also be caused by a number of other treatable conditions, so it's important to see your doctor if you experience any of them.

### How the Screening Is Performed

Once the patient is sedated, a colonoscopy is performed by inserting a lighted, flexible tube called a coloscope into the rectum to view the inside of the colon. A tiny camera on the end of the tube transmits images of the colon for the physician to view during the procedure. During the test, the doctor examines the lining of the colon for polyps and other abnormalities.

The preparation for the test includes a liquid diet 24 hours before the procedure and using a laxative to empty the bowels so the doctor has a clear view of the colon during the screening. The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes and is

relatively painless. Patients are given sedation during the procedure and spend about 30 minutes in the recovery room for observation after the test.

"A colonoscopy is an outpatient procedure, so patients are able to go home the same day, and usually only miss one day of work," said Dr. Gaylord.

### Colorectal Cancer Risk Factors

Although colorectal cancer can occur at any age, it is most common in adults 50 and over. Others at increased risk include those with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease and those with a first-degree relative with the disease. African Americans and men have a slightly higher risk of developing colorectal cancer. Contributing lifestyle factors include obesity, tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and diets high in saturated fat.

"A screening colonoscopy is an important preventive exam, and if the patient's colon is normal, the test only has to be repeated every 10 years," said Dr. Gaylord. "And if a precancerous polyp is found, it can usually be removed during the procedure before cancer develops or spreads with no discomfort to the patient."

Talk with your primary care physician to find out when you should be scheduled for screening.



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