

Know the facts about colon cancer

Shekhar Challa, MD, Kansas Medical Clinic, will discuss colorectal cancer at the next Senior*Spirit* program, scheduled for noon March 24 in the Auditorium. For more information or to register, please contact Nanny Matthias at ext. 5439 or by e-mail.

There are many misconceptions when it comes to colon and colorectal cancer. Read below to clear up any questions you may have about the disease. These common myths and facts are courtesy of Kansas Medical Clinic Gastroenterology.

Myth: Colon is a disease that affects only Caucasian males.

Fact: Colon cancer affects individuals equally regardless of gender and, typically, race. Recent studies suggest that African-Americans have a higher incidence of colon cancer and, therefore, should consider getting screen beginning at age 45. If you are African-American, discuss this issue with your physician.

Myth: Only people with family history of colon cancer get it.

Fact: Nearly 75 percent of colon cancer cases have no family history and most have no symptoms. A family history only means those patients need to start preventive colon cancer screenings at age 40 rather than the recommended age of 50 for those who have no family history.

Myth: I don't have any symptoms, so I must not have colon cancer.

Fact: In its early stages, colon cancer generally has no symptoms and gives no warnings. Further in the cancer's development, patients may experience symptoms such as stool changes, rectal bleeding, abdominal pain and unexplained weight loss. Once people begin to experience these symptoms, it can be a sign of more advanced cancer with lower survival rates. That is why screening is so important.

Myth: Preparing for a colonoscopy is difficult.

Fact: Preparing for this screening involves emptying the colon by fasting paired with prescription and over-the-counter laxatives. Occasionally an enema will need to be performed. The patient's doctor will help determine which options will be used. Though the preparation can be inconvenient, it is not difficult or painful.

Myth: Colonoscopies are unpleasant and uncomfortable.

Fact: The screening is neither painful nor unpleasant. During the test, patients are sedated to eliminate or minimize discomfort, and the actual procedure only lasts 15 to 30 minutes. For most people, normal activities can be resumed the next day.

Myth: Katie Couric got a colonoscopy on television, so I should get one too.

Fact: Colonoscopy screenings are recommended for men and women beginning at age 50. People younger than 50 who have other risk factors – such as a family history of cancer, obesity, smoking, ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease – should discuss earlier screening options with their doctor.

Myth: There are several ways to screen for colon cancer without undergoing a colonoscopy.

Fact: There are several screening options for colorectal cancer, including flexible sigmoidoscopy, fecal occult blood test and double-contrast barium enema and virtual colonoscopy. However, a colonoscopy is considered the most accurate. It detects more cancers, examines the entire colon and can screen, diagnose and remove polyps in the same procedure.

Myth: A polyp means I have cancer.

Fact: Polyps are benign growths that have the potential to develop into cancerous tissue if left unchecked. They can be removed easily during a colonoscopy, eliminating the possibility that they could become cancerous.

Myth: A colon cancer diagnosis means I am dying.

Fact: When colon cancer is caught early, it has a more than 90 percent survival rate, which is why screening is so important. Once colon cancer spreads, the survival rates decrease significantly.

Myth: I can’t afford screening.

Fact: Most insurance plans cover a colonoscopy. Required copay amounts will vary by plan.

About Kansas Medical Clinic

Shekhar Challa, MD; Jerry Feagan, MD; and Ashraf M. Sufi, MD, perform thousands of endoscopic procedures, including screening colonoscopies, and provide sensitive, reliable patient care. For more information about a screening colonoscopy, please call 785-354-8518 or visit www.kmcpa.com