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Colorectal Cancer Screening

Cancer in the colon or rectum is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Yet, if this cancer is found and removed early, the chances of a full recovery are very good. Since colorectal cancer rarely causes symptoms in its early stages, screening for the disease is important. It is even more crucial if you have high risk factors for the disease.

Your risk of having colorectal cancer increase if you:

- Are over 50
- Have a family or personal history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps
- Have a personal history of colorectal polyps, Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- Have a family history of multiple concurrent solid-tumor cancers.

Types of Screening

Our doctors use a variety of tests to screen for colorectal cancer, in addition to taking your medical history to identify any risk factors and performing a digital rectal exam.

Colonoscopy is the best test for finding and removing colorectal polyps. You receive intravenous sedation and then a flexible, lighted tube (colonoscope) is gently inserted into the rectum and guided through the entire colon. Images of the colon are view on a video screen. Any polyps that are found are removed and sent to a lab for further testing. If a polyp cannot be removed, a sample of tissue is taken and the polyp is removed later during surgery.

Sigmoidoscopy is similar to colonoscopy, but focuses only on the sigmoid colon and rectum. You are awake during this procedure, but you may be given medication to help you relax. During the test, your doctor guides a thin, flexible, lighted tube (sigmoidoscope) through your rectum and lower colon. The images are displayed on a video screen. Polyps are removed, if possible, and sent to a lab for further testing.

The fecal occult blood test checks for any blood hidden in stool that may be a sign of colon polyps or cancer. A small sample of stool is tested for blood in a laboratory. Most often, you collect this sample at home using a kit and bring it to the Quest Lab Technician located in our office.

Barium Enema uses x-rays to provide images of the entire colon and rectum. Your doctor inserts a soft tube into the rectum to fill the colon with a contrast liquid (barium) that helps the colon show up clearly on the x-rays. You are away for the test, but you may be given medication to help you relax. You will need to have a responsible adult with you for the procedure since you will be unable to drive if you have taken the medication.

Virtual colonoscopy uses magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to create a 3-dimensional view of the colon. You lie on a table while a small tube is inserted into the rectum. Then, the table is moved into the machine and images are taken of your colon. A computer combines these photos to create a 3-dimensional picture.

Risks and possible complications

Bleeding

A puncture or tear in the colon

Risks of anesthesia

Failure to detect a polyp