

Health Awareness

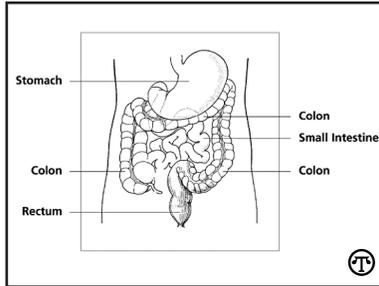
Colon Cancer: A Preventable Cancer

(NAPSA)—Perhaps the least understood and most compelling aspect of colon cancer is that it can often be stopped before it even starts. With this in mind, a campaign by the American Cancer Society is raising awareness that this third most common cause of cancer death among both men and women in the United States is frequently preventable and highly treatable if detected early. The Society estimates that this year, 145,290 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer (commonly referred to as colon cancer) and 56,290 will die of the disease, a number that could be cut in half if Americans followed American Cancer Society testing recommendations for colon cancer.

Many Americans Fail to Get Tested

Despite overwhelming evidence that testing can save lives, many Americans still are not getting tested for colon cancer, starting at age 50. Colon cancer is the rare case where testing can actually prevent the disease. Suspicious polyps (precancerous changes or growths in the lining of the colon and rectum) can be removed before they turn cancerous. Thanks in part to increased testing, colon cancer incidence rates decreased about three percent a year between 1998 and 2001. Increased testing and improvements in survival have also led to a lower death rate, which has decreased an average of 1.8 percent per year over the past 15 years.

When colon cancer is caught early, it has a 90 percent five-year survival rate. Still, fewer than four in 10 (39 percent) of these cancers are discovered at the earliest, most



COLON CANCER: IT'S PREVENTABLE—If you're fifty or older, talk to your doctor about your testing options.

treatable stage. The American Cancer Society says increasing colon cancer testing among adults 50 and older represents the single greatest opportunity to decrease colon cancer death rates in this country (more than 90 percent of cases are diagnosed in people over the age of 50).

"It's becoming clear that people 50 and older just do not see themselves as being at risk for colon cancer and needing to be tested," said Stephen F. Sener, MD, national volunteer president of the American Cancer Society. "If we can increase awareness and compliance to the level we've done with the Pap test and the mammogram, we will have a tremendous opportunity to save thousands of lives through prevention and early detection."

Myths and Misperceptions About Colon Cancer

The reasons for low testing rates include many misconceptions. One common colon cancer myth is that only people with a family history need to be concerned about colon cancer. While it is true that those who have a family history of the disease are

at increased risk, the majority of cases occur in people whose only risk factor is their age, which is why people at average risk should start getting tested at age 50. People with family history of the disease or who have other risk factors should talk to their doctor about starting testing even earlier. Many women think of colon cancer as strictly a "man's disease," but the reality is that it kills more women than ovarian, uterine and cervical cancers combined. Other people think testing is necessary only when symptoms arise. Yet symptoms are often a sign that the disease has progressed into more advanced stages. Testing is most effective before a patient develops signs of illness.

Calling All Doctors

The Society also emphasizes the major role doctors play in increasing testing rates. "Physicians are the most important factor in getting patients tested for colon cancer," said Durado Brooks, MD, the Society's director of prostate and colorectal cancer. "If your doctor recommends it, you're more likely to get tested. During most patient visits, doctors have a lot to cover in a short time. But the benefits of colon cancer testing are so great that they need to take the time to emphasize the importance of these tests.

The American Cancer Society makes reliable information regarding colon cancer, risk factors, prevention and testing available any time, day or night. For a free information kit to help you talk to your doctor about colon cancer testing, call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org for additional information.