

# Q&A with Dr. Frederick Fallick: Colorectal Cancer



According to the American Cancer Society, excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the United States. In observance of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, let's chat with SMG gastroenterologist Dr. Frederick Fallick to learn more about the disease.

## **What is colorectal cancer? Where does it start in the body?**

Colorectal cancers start in the colon or rectum. It begins as a growth in the lining of the colon or rectum called a polyp. Colorectal can be prevented by removing these precancerous growths before they turn into cancer.

## **What are some of the symptoms that may be overlooked?**

In some instances, symptoms of colorectal cancer may not appear until the cancer is at a more advanced stage.

Common symptoms could include:

- Fatigue, but doesn't go away with rest
- Rectal bleeding
- Change in bowel habits
- Cramping and bloating
- Unintentional weight loss
- Bloody stools or black, tarry stools

You know your body best - it's extremely important to listen to your body and recognize any changes. If something does not feel right, it's essential to get it checked out.

## **Are colonoscopies effective in detecting this disease?**

A colonoscopy is one of the most effective screening tools to detect colon cancer. Recently, the American Cancer Society updated its guidelines for colorectal screening, lowering the age at which adults should start getting screening from 50 to 45. Those with a history of colon cancer or colon polyps, should discuss screening options with their physician. Your gastroenterologist can spot and remove polyps during a colonoscopy therefore reducing your risk of developing colorectal cancer. A colonoscopy should be performed every five to ten years depending on your past test results and risk factors.

## **There are other tests that detect colorectal cancer. Are they more effective than a regular colonoscopy?**

There is a test called Cologuard - an at-home screening test available by prescription. This test looks for blood or altered DNA in your stool that could be a sign of cancer. However, Cologuard detects cancer after you've already had it.

A virtual colonoscopy uses x-rays to produce a series of pictures of the colon and rectum. These images can show polyps and other possible abnormalities. If polyps are found, a regular colonoscopy will be needed to remove them.

A traditional colonoscopy is the most effective method of finding precancerous polyps and removing them immediately. Other tests may result in a false negative or even positive.

## **What can I do to reduce my risk?**

Adopting a healthy lifestyle will always help in reducing your risk - you should:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Increase your physical activity
- Avoid tobacco
- Limit your consumption of processed foods and red meat
- Eat a diet low in fat, salt and sugar; choose whole grains, lean proteins as well as lots of fresh fruit and veggies

**Learn about your risk and discuss any potential symptoms. Call (914) 723-8100 to schedule an appointment with Dr. Fallick.**