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THE PUBLIC PULSE “Your Health Department Working For You”

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MARCH IS NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Colorectal Cancer (cancer of the colon or rectum) is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. This disease is highly preventable if you get screened beginning at age 50, and take the necessary steps to reduce your risk. Abnormal growths, called *polyps*, form in the colon or the rectum. These abnormal growths can turn into cancer.

Screening tests help find polyps so they can be removed. Screenings also find cancer early, when treatment can be most effective. It is important to visit your doctor if you notice any abnormalities or discomfort with your bowels. Any sign of blood should be brought to your doctor’s attention. If you don’t tell your doctor, they won’t know about the discomfort you are experiencing.

The risk of colorectal cancer increases with age. More than 90% of colorectal cancers occur in people aged 50 and older. Precancerous polyps and colorectal cancer don’t always cause symptoms, and people may not be aware they have signs of colorectal cancer.

Symptoms may include:

- Blood in the stool (bowel movement)
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that do not go away
- Rapid weight loss without trying to lose weight

- Diarrhea, constipation or a feeling in the rectum that the bowel movement isn't quite complete
- Vomiting
- Constantly feeling tired

What You Can Do

- If you're aged 50 to 75, get screened for colorectal cancer according to your physician's guidelines
- Eat right
- Increase your physical activity.
- Don't drink too much alcohol.
- Don't smoke. If you do smoke, quit.

When Should I Begin to Get Screened?

You should begin screening for colorectal cancer soon after turning 50, then continue getting screened at regular intervals. However, you may need to be tested earlier than 50, or more often than other people, if:

- You or a close relative have had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- You have an inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.
- You have a genetic syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (Lynch syndrome).

If you think you are at increased risk for colorectal cancer, speak with your doctor about when to begin screening, which test is right for you, and how often to get tested.

A healthy colon starts with what you eat. A diet packed with fruits and vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains is crucial for your colon's health. Eat the recommended 30 grams of fiber every day from the five servings of fruits and vegetables. Eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids like tuna, salmon, nuts, flax seeds, and spinach. Cut out processed meats and eat less red

meats. To reduce your risk of colorectal cancer, as in the case with many other diseases, avoid tobacco, limit your alcohol intake and increase your physical exercise.

Speak with your health care provider about any concerns. You can visit <http://preventcancer.org/> for further information about colorectal cancer screenings and prevention. Early detection is very important, especially if you are at risk for colorectal cancer or if you have family history of colorectal cancer.

For more information about the health department services, community data, or health status data, contact the Public Information Officer at the Davidson County Health Department at (336) 242-2354.