



WHAT AFRICAN AMERICANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER



Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon or rectum and is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States for men and women combined, and will account for 56,290 deaths in 2005. But 90 percent of all colorectal cancer cases and deaths are preventable by removing polyps and cancer can be successfully treated – and often cured – when detected early. That is why screening for prevention and early detection is so important.

All men and women are at risk for colorectal cancer. Some people are at higher risk for the disease because of age, lifestyle or personal and family medical history. According to studies, African Americans are at a higher risk for the disease than other populations.

Routine screening tests can help prevent colorectal cancer and can detect the disease in its early stages when it is more easily treated. Starting at age 50, men and women at average risk for colorectal cancer should begin routine screening tests. Due to new research findings that African Americans have lower mean age at diagnosis than any other population, experts suggest that African Americans get screened beginning at age 45. If you have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, colorectal polyps or inflammatory bowel disease, talk with your health care professional – you may need to be tested earlier or more frequently.

Polyps are grapelike growths on the lining of the colon or rectum that may become cancer. These polyps can be removed to prevent cancer from ever occurring. Colonoscopy, performed by a well-trained endoscopist, gastroenterologist, or surgeon is the most effective screening test and plays an important role in colon cancer prevention because precancerous polyps can be removed when they are discovered.

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT FACTS:

- The rate of being diagnosed with colorectal cancer is higher among African Americans than among any other population group in the United States.
- Death rates from colorectal cancer are higher among African Americans than any other population group in the United States.
- Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer among African Americans, with an estimated 14,100 cases expected to occur among this population per year. Of these, an estimated 6,800 deaths will result.

- There is evidence that African Americans are less likely than Caucasians to have screening tests for colorectal cancer.
- African Americans are less likely than Caucasians to have colorectal polyps detected when they can easily be removed.
- African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in advanced stages when there are fewer treatment options available. They are less likely to live five or more years after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer than other populations.
- Diet, tobacco use and a lack of access to equal medical treatment options may increase African Americans' risk of developing colon cancer.
- There may also be genetic factors that contribute to the higher incidence of colorectal cancer among some African Americans. Learn your family's medical history and tell your health care professional if a relative — parent, brother, sister or child — has had colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps.
- African American women have the same probability of getting colorectal cancer as men, and are more likely to die of colorectal cancer than are women of any other population group.
- African American patients experience a larger number of polyps on the right side of the colon, versus the left. A screening endoscopy must cover the entire colon, as is performed with a colonoscopy.