

## **Colon Cancer – Is it time for a screening?**

*As seen in the neighborhood newsletter.*

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At Cedar Park Pediatric and Family Medicine, we believe preventive medicine is a very important part of patient care that begins in childhood and continues throughout life. This involves identifying possible future medical problems and taking action to prevent disease, such as cancer. Everyone is aware there are a variety of types of cancer affecting people of all ages.

Colorectal cancer continues to be a major cause of death in the US and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common cancer in men and women. Recently, we saw that Tony Snow, former White House press secretary, passed away at 53 from recurrent colon cancer. The American Cancer Society predicts almost 150,000 new cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed this year. This is an unfortunate statistic because colon cancer can be prevented if discovered early enough.

So what can be done to prevent this disease? Currently the recommendation is to get a screening colonoscopy at the age of 50. A screening colonoscopy allows for a visualization of the entire colon to evaluate for suspicious areas. If a suspicious area is seen, a biopsy can be performed for further evaluation. After a negative colonoscopy, another one is not due for 10 years. If anything is abnormal, it may be recommended to get another one sooner.

The idea of the screening colonoscopy is to find possible problems years before they can become cancer. We have discovered that colon cancer starts as a pre-malignant polyp. These polyps can be seen on a colonoscopy and removed by biopsy. If these polyps are completely removed, they don't progress to become cancer. But, if a colonoscopy is never performed, those asymptomatic polyps are allowed to continue to grow.

As with other cancers, colorectal cancer tends to run in families, so it is important to know your own families medical history. If someone in your family has had colon cancer, then it is much more important for you to get a colonoscopy. It may be important for you to get a colonoscopy before the age of 50 as well. It is generally recommended that you get a screening colonoscopy 10 years before the age that the cancer was discovered. So if your father was diagnosed with colon cancer at the age of 54, you should be talking to your doctor about arranging a colonoscopy around the age of 44.

Colonoscopies tend to be performed by a Gastroenterologist, but talking to your primary care physician is a good way to get the process started. Most insurance companies allow for a yearly "wellness visit", which is a good time to discuss colonoscopy as well as other preventive medicine issues. During these visits, you can discuss with the doctor topics like nutrition, exercise, and screening for other types of cancer. These are also good opportunities to prevent serious diseases by checking things like blood pressure and cholesterol and allow you to get immunizations you or your child may need to stay healthy.

For more information about medical topics or our clinic, please visit our website at [www.cedarparkdoctors.com](http://www.cedarparkdoctors.com).