



March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month - Early Detection Saves Lives!

Even though colorectal cancer can be detected and treated in its early stages, colorectal cancer remains the third leading cause of cancer death for women.(1) Everyone 50-75 years old should be screened for colorectal cancer.(2)

Colorectal cancer usually develops over the course of several years beginning as a simple growth of tissue (polyp) or as a flat lesion in the lining of the colon or rectum. Colorectal cancer screening can detect these growths so they can be removed before they progress to cancer. At least 6 out of every 10 deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented if all men and women aged 50 years or older were screened routinely.(3)

Risk Factors

The risk of colorectal cancer increases with age, with 90% of cancers being diagnosed in adults over 50 years of age.(4) Risk is also strongly linked to certain inherited genetic mutations, family history of colorectal cancer, and personal history of inflammatory bowel disease. The most common lifestyle factors associated with colorectal cancer are obesity, physical inactivity, cigarette smoking, a high fat diet, and heavy alcohol consumption.

Screening

Early colorectal cancer often has no symptoms which is why screening is so important. However, screening rates are low for women 50 years and older in Los Angeles County (60%), especially compared with rates of other preventive screening tests such as mammography (84%) and Pap tests (74%).(5) The rates are also far below the Healthy People 2020 target of 70.5% of adults 50-75 years old screened for colorectal cancer. Reasons for low screening rates include lack of knowledge about the importance of screening, testing options, and the treatability of colorectal cancer; embarrassment and unpleasantness of screening; fear of being diagnosed with cancer; logistics (needing a ride home for a colonoscopy), and the cost - especially for low-income, uninsured women.

What You Can Do

Whether you are a community-based organization, primary care provider or other health professional, the promotion of colorectal cancer screening is central to improving screening rates and ultimately mortality from colorectal cancer.

Based on the evidence-based strategies in the Community Guide to preventive services, the following is recommended for providers in order to promote colorectal cancer screening: client reminders, small media (includes videos and printed materials), one-on-one education, and reducing structural barriers. (6)

Messages to health consumers should be tailored to be personally relevant, empowering, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. Please find Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) patient education materials on colorectal cancer [here](#).

Prevention Matters!

Prevention strategies for colorectal cancer and improving general health and wellness include a good diet with plenty of grains, regular physical activity, limiting alcohol, not smoking, and, of course, getting recommended screenings.

Be Active, Eat Smart, Don't Smoke, Get Checked!

References

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/data/women.htm>
2. <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf08/colocancer/colors.htm>
3. http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/prevention.htm
4. http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/risk_factors.htm
5. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Women's Health. Health Indicators for Women in Los Angeles County: Highlighting Disparities by Ethnicity and Poverty Level, February 2010.
<http://lapublichealth.org/phcommon/public/reports/rptspubdisplay.cfm?unit=owh&ou=ph&prog=programs>
6. <http://thecommunityguide.org/cancer/screening/client-oriented/index.html>