

MEDICAL MOMENTS

# Colorectal Cancer

## Don't Delay Screenings

***Colorectal cancer is the second-most frequent cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S. Despite the availability of several effective screening tests.***

Colorectal cancer screening rates remain below national goals while screenings are down, experts say that the number of young people developing colorectal cancer before 50 continues to increase. This trend began in the early 1990s.

According to Dr. Lisa Boardman, a Mayo Clinic Gastroenterologist. "The majority of those increases are in people ages 40 to 49, but half of young-onset colorectal cancer patients are under 40 years old. We used to think of colorectal cancer as a disease of aging. With the increase in the number of cases of colorectal cancer globally, there are clearly other factors in addition to aging that contribute to the development of colorectal cancer." Dr. Boardman also mentions that "about 20% of the people who develop early-onset or young-onset colon cancer will be found to have a hereditary type of genetic change and may be related to changes in diet, increasing rates of obesity and decreased physical activity, but at this point, why

more younger people are being diagnosed with colorectal cancer remains unknown."

In a recent study lead by Lila Rutten, Ph.D., a Health Services Researcher at Mayo Clinic, which covered a survey that was administered online in late 2019 and completed by 779 primary care clinicians and 159 gastroenterologists, shown that the recommendations of primary care clinicians and gastroenterologists strongly influence whether patients are screened and what type of screening they choose—direct visualization, such as colonoscopy, or noninvasive options, such as stool-based screening.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening beginning at 50. Earlier screening is recommended for some groups, depending on risk factors. African Americans, for instance, have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer and are encouraged to begin screening at 45. "Nearly one-third of eligible adults in the U.S. are not up to date on colorectal cancer screening, and even lower rates have been observed among populations that are traditionally underserved," says Lila Rutten, Ph.D.

Since most younger persons are not timely screened, it is especially important to be aware of the symptoms and how could colorectal cancer manifest itself like abdominal pain, change in normal bowel pattern, unexplained or unintended weight loss, blood in the stool or dark tarry stools. Additionally, fatigue can result from blood leaking from the tumor and leading to anemia, a decrease in oxygen-carrying hemoglobin that is measured by a blood test. Some risk factors associated with colorectal cancer are family history, inflammatory bowel disease, diabetes, low-fiber and high-fat diet, radiation therapy for cancer and hereditary colon cancer syndrome.

Don't delay screening. There are options for colorectal cancer screening tests including those that can be done either at home or in a clinic, that can prevent or detect cancer early. With the availability of multiple screening options with distinct benefits and drawbacks related to effectiveness, access, cost, risk and patient acceptability, it is critical to encourage informed choice and shared decision-making between patients and their health care providers. Ask your health care provider which is right for you.