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Health Matters: Colon Polyps

Triston Sanders - Medical Anchor

Every year more than 50,000 people in the United States die of colon cancer. The tragedy with this type of cancer is that in virtually all cases, colon cancer starts with an early warning sign which is a growth known as a polyp.

In this Health Matters we'll take a look at the importance of being screened for polyps so your doctor can find and remove them before they become cancerous.

Most colon polyps start out as harmless, but over time the polyp can undergo a malignant change and can become an invasive cancer.

David Myers found out just how important screening for these growths can be.

David says, "I had no symptoms but they found polyps."

Sometimes polyps can cause symptoms such as rectal bleeding; a change in bowel habits lasting for more than a week and abdominal pain, but most of the time smaller polyps don't cause problems, which is why a colonoscopy is so important.

Dr. Roy Schwartz says, "Colonoscopy is our best tool, and not only can it be diagnostic but also therapeutic, a lot of the polyps can be removed via colonoscopy."

Although anyone can develop polyps, you're at higher risk if you are over the age of 50, a smoker, overweight, eat a high-fat, low-fiber diet, or have a personal or family history of colon polyps or colon cancer.

Dr. Eric C. Rost, oncologist, says, "We think a good proper diet and exercise will decrease your risk of colon cancer, however, there is a genetic factor."

If you have no family history, current guidelines recommend that your first colonoscopy be at age 50. If a family history exists, your physician may lower that age.

David Myers says he wants to tell people not to take chances with their health.

"It's a pretty important thing to do."

And by finding and removing the polyps before they become cancerous, you can stop colon cancer before it starts.

Early colon cancer usually has no symptoms, so the absence of symptoms should never be a reason to delay or ignore colon cancer testing.

Experts predict 30,000 lives could be saved a year if everyone age 50 and older got tested for colon cancer.

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