

# CANCER SCREENING

## Cancer Screening

Quality time is often defined in terms of how we spend precious free time with our children, our spouse, our relatives, and our friends. The goal often is to grab hold of the zest of life, and create memories to last a lifetime.

In this quest to live life fully and in the moment, we sometimes lose sight of personal needs, especially when it comes to the care of our health.

Although today's seniors are living longer and more active lives than previous generations, there is still a heightened risk of cancer that comes with aging. This is why it is very important to invest some "quality time" in seeking proper care and attention.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), over 1.2 million (not including skin cancer, which will exceed 1 million) will be diagnosed with some form of cancer this year. Over 555,000 are expected to succumb to their disease.

Fortunately, pro-active lifestyle changes, such as proper nutrition, weight control, abstinence from smoking, and limited exposure to second-hand smoke, alcohol, and sun, have contributed greatly to reducing the risk.

There is another measure which may be employed although often put on the back burner to improve the odds of living a long, healthy life. That is regular cancer screenings.

The importance of regular screening lies in the early detection of cancerous cells. The earlier a cancer is detected, the greater the success of treatment, as well as the variety of treatment options available.

Many forms of cancer are highly treatable, even curable, when diagnosed in its early stages, before it has had an opportunity to travel to other locations in the body.

### **Breast**

Mammograms are highly recommended for women age 40+. Women with a high risk (prior breast cancer; familial history of premenopausal breast cancer, etc.) should have a mammogram every year starting at age 30. Those between the ages of 20-39, without high risk, should conduct monthly breast self-exams, and have a clinical breast exam every three years.

### **Prostate**

Starting at age 50 (age 45 for African Americans and those at high risk), men should have a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test and a digital rectal exam annually.

### **Colon & Rectum**

Both men and women should be screened for colorectal cancers starting at age 50. Screenings include a fecal occult blood test every year; a sigmoidoscopy every five years; a barium enema every five to ten years; and a colonoscopy every ten years.

### **General Check-up**

An annual cancer-related clinical physical exam should be conducted every year for those ages 40+. Additionally, everyone should regularly examine their skin and moles, mouth, thyroid gland, genitals, rectal area and lymph nodes for any suspicious changes, lumps or patches.

Following these few simple recommendations will be time well spent in maintaining the quality of life.

## Oral Cancer

- A sore on the lip or in the mouth that does not heal
- A lump on the lip or in the mouth or throat
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth
- Unusual bleeding, pain, or numbness in the mouth
- A sore throat that does not go away, or a feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable
- A change in the voice
- Pain in the ear

## Skin Cancer

- New growth or sore that doesn't heal
- Not all skin cancers look the same they can be:
  - A small, smooth, shiny, pale, or waxy lump
  - A firm, red lump
  - A lump that bleeds or develops a crust
  - Can start as a flat, red spot that is rough, dry or scaly
- Areas most affected are the head, face, neck, hands, and arms, but can appear anywhere
- Actinic keratosis, a precancerous condition, appears as rough, red or brown scaly patches on the Skin

## Cervical Cancer

- Abnormal bleeding
  - May start and stop between regular menstrual periods
  - May occur after sexual intercourse or pelvic exam
  - Bleeding after menopause
- Increased vaginal discharge

## Ovarian Cancer

- Hard to find early
- Pelvic or abdominal pain or discomfort, and/or feeling of fullness
- Bloating/swelling in the abdomen/unexplained weight gain you look suddenly pregnant
- Weight loss/appetite loss
- Feeling tired
- Vague but persistent gastrointestinal upsets such as gas, nausea and indigestion
- Backache
- Cramps
- Bladder or other urinary problems (frequency and/or urgency of urination in absence of an infection)
- Unexplained changes in bowel habits
- Hard-feeling ovaries
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Pain during intercourse

## Endometrial Cancer

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding after menopause
- Difficult or painful urination
- Pain during intercourse
- Pain in the pelvic area

## Stomach Cancer

- Indigestion or a burning sensation (heartburn)
- Discomfort or pain in the abdomen
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Bloating of the stomach after meals
- Loss of appetite
- Weakness and fatigue
- Bleeding (vomiting blood or having blood in the stool)