

## COLON CANCER

Colon cancer is receiving more and more attention and publicity because recently, a famous news anchor became affected with it and locally a young doctor succumbed to the disease.

Colon cancer is a battle that could be fought and won by informing the public about the causes, risk factors and prevention.

You are what you eat! What you eat is associated with increased risk of colon cancer; for example, in Africa, the incidence of colon cancer is low because the diet is mostly vegetarian. Where the USA and the rest of the western world has increased incidence of colon cancer because of the inclusion of meat products which lead to decreased transit time in the colon (constipation) which gives more exposure to bacteria and carcinogenic chemicals resulting in polyps and cancer.

Genetics is a strong factor in colon cancer. The risk of cancer increases if you have first generation family member with colon cancer (brother, sister, parents). Patients in these circumstances have to understand that screening (i.e. endoscopy: starts earlier than the rest of the population and is different (colonoscopy versus flexible sigmoidoscopy).

### WHAT TO DO FOR PREVENTION

1 - Eat right - moderation is the key, eating healthy food such as bran, vegetables, salad, fish, chicken.

2 - Constipation - should not be ignored. In addition to the discomfort, that the patient has, it could be a symptom of colonic disease or cancer and/or could add to the risk of colonic cancer.

3 - Screening - The most important factor in prevention is screening. It is recommended by the American Cancer Society to have flexible sigmoidoscopy every 3 to 5 year after the age 50.

People with family members having colon cancer should have colonoscopy 10 years earlier than the age of their loved one was when affected with it. A colonoscopy involves the introduction of a flexible tube into the colon to evaluate, diagnose and, at times, treat colon disease such as the removal of polyps.

We have to remember that we should be active players in this fight against cancer and patients should understand that screening is for their benefit. Although having a colonoscopy is not a totally pleasant process, it is better to have a precancerous or cancerous polyp removed through the scop versus undergoing a colon surgery for cancer.

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