I just turned 50. Do I really need to have a colonoscopy?

March 1, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Yes. Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. Cancer screening using regular colonoscopies has led to a dramatic reduction in the number of deaths from cancer of the colon and rectum. Experts recommend screening for colorectal cancer starting at age 50 years and continuing until age 75 years. Colonoscopies for adults aged 76 to 85 years are done on an individual basis.

Don't put off having this procedure until you are older. The incidence of young onset colorectal cancer is rising rapidly. Regardless of your age, see your doctor if you notice bloody or very dark stools or blood coming from the rectum. Other worrisome signs are a change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool lasting for more than a few days.

[Editor's Note: In May 2018 the American Cancer Society updated its guidelines to recommend colon cancer screening starting at age 45. Read more here.]

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Click here to learn more about colorectal cancer.

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