

Colorectal cancer: Are you at risk?

AN AGGRESSIVE NEW SCREENING PROGRAM
CAN HELP YOU FIND OUT

COLORECTAL CANCER CLAIMED 45,000 AMERICAN lives last year, and many of those people didn't need to die. Fortunately, a new multidisciplinary screening program at Monmouth Medical Center can now help people conquer this eminently beatable disease.

We know that with screening techniques such as colonoscopy—a visual examination of an emptied colon with a scope—many incipient cancers can be spotted early enough for effective treatment, and many precancerous polyps (projecting buds of tissue in the colon) can be found and removed before they become malignant. That's why a colonoscopy every 10 years or less is recommended for all of us once we turn 50.

But did you know that a few of us face a special, elevated risk? A hereditary condition called Lynch syndrome is thought to be responsible for 2 to 7 percent of the roughly 160,000 new colorectal cancer cases diagnosed each year. Lynch syndrome has been linked to variations in four specific genes that are involved when DNA is copied as cells divide. People with the syndrome “tend to get cancer earlier, in their 30s or 40s, and have a 50 percent risk of passing it on to their children,” says Michael Arvanitis, M.D., chief of colon and rectal surgery at Monmouth.

For that reason, Dr. Arvanitis' division, along with the Department of Gastroenterology and the High-Risk Cancer Assessment Program at the Leon Hess Cancer Center, has started the Familial Colorectal Cancer Registry. “This is a multispecialty team approach to the assessment of family risk, genetic counseling and testing and treatment of polyps and cancer,” says Dr. Arvanitis. To his knowledge, it's the only one of its kind in the state.

The free program allows anyone to learn about his or her personal risks for the disease. The first step involves completing a detailed family health history and a five-page family colorectal cancer risk evaluation form.

MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER COLORECTAL SURGEONS:

Michael Arvanitis, M.D.

Roy M. Dresner, D.O.

Glenn S. Parker, M.D.

Thomas R. Lake III, M.D.

For a referral, call 1-888-724-7123.

A genetic counselor then reviews the family history to determine the likelihood that hereditary factors play a part in that person's cancer risk.

“We put people into one of three risk categories: average, increased or high,” says Dr. Arvanitis. Those in the first two groups are advised about screening and other cancer prevention strategies, based on American Cancer Society recommendations for diet, exercise and colonoscopy.

People who are found to be at high risk may choose to undergo genetic counseling and a blood test to look for Lynch syndrome and three other hereditary risk factors—services that are billed to their health insurer.

These patients are also admitted into the High-Risk Cancer Assessment Clinic, which offers colonoscopy and other screenings along with treatments, including surgery if needed. They also receive education about the disease and lifelong follow-up from the clinic. ⁿ

How you can learn about your colorectal cancer risk

It starts with picking up the phone—or typing a quick e-mail. If you, a family member or friend are interested in joining the Familial Colorectal Cancer Registry or want to schedule an appointment at Monmouth Medical Center's High-Risk Cancer Assessment Program, call 732-923-6576.