Don’t Be Afraid of Colorectal Cancer Screening

Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. The chances of survival are high when diagnosed before the cancer invades adjacent tissue or spreads to another site. “Screening has become very important in the battle against colorectal cancer. The thought of a colonoscopy can be unnerving, but in reality it is a short and relatively painless procedure,” says Michael Older, MD, a gastroenterologist at Nashoba Valley Medical Center. “However, you do have other options. There are many different colorectal screening tests to choose from.”

The Different Types of Screening Tests
Colorectal screening tests are designed to detect cancer or polyps. Polyps are finger-like projections that grow on the inside of the colon wall. Generally, polyps are not cancerous, but it is believed the vast majority of undetected colorectal cancers begin as polyps. They can also be found to be precancerous. Precancerous polyps have subtle changes associated with them that increase the risk of them becoming cancerous.

“The risk of colorectal cancer increases with age,” explains Annie Chemmanur, MD, another of the medical center’s gastroenterologists. “For men with average risk, this means screening should begin at age 50 and age 45 for African Americans and American Indians/Alaska Natives.”

The time between tests depends on the type of test you choose to have and your underlying risk. Recommended screening tests include the following:

- Fecal occult blood and fecal immunochemical tests
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- Double-contrast barium enema
- CT colonography
- MR colonography

Screening Recommendations
The American Cancer Society suggests that starting at age 50, men and women at average risk of developing colorectal cancer should use one of the following options:

- Colonoscopy every 10 years
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- CT colonography every five years
- Double-contrast barium enema every five years
- Annual fecal occult blood test (FOBT)

However, people at increased risk of colorectal cancer may need to have some of these tests earlier in life and more often. Some reasons why you would be considered high risk are:

- Personal or family history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps
- Personal history of chronic inflammatory bowel disease, such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease

Talk to your doctor about the advantages and disadvantages of each screening test, especially if your risk for colorectal cancer is greater than average. These tests may save your life.

Nashoba Valley Medical Center Offers State-of-the-art Screening
The gastroenterology services department at Nashoba Valley Medical Center offers the revolutionary Olympus EVIS EXERA III video endoscopy system to help with the detection of gastrointestinal (GI) diseases, including colorectal cancer, at an earlier stage when treatments are most successful. The Olympus EVIS EXERA III uses a video processor, light source, endoscope and monitor, which enables our doctors to peer inside the body to diagnose, detect, and treat GI diseases and other conditions. The benefits of the Olympus EVIS EXERA III system include enhanced image quality, improved patient comfort and early detection.

To learn more about Nashoba Valley Medical Center’s gastroenterology services, call 978-784-9421 or visit www.nashobamed.org/GI. To find a gastroenterologist, call Steward DoctorFinder™ at 1-800-488-5959.