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Endoscopy

Gastrointestinal Medicine

Nutrition



The Centre for GI Health

BOWEL CANCER SCREENING

Cancer of the large bowel (colorectal cancer) occurs in about 1 in 25 Australians. The cancer is uncommon below the age of 40 years but increases in incidence after 50 years.

Those with a family history of bowel cancer, or bowel polyps, or past history of polyps or inflammatory bowel disease are at a higher risk than the average (from two to six fold). Screening by colonoscopy for such individuals is advised.

Studies suggest that dietary factors have a role in cancer formation and that by reducing fat and alcohol in the diet as well as increasing the intake of fibre, calcium, vegetables and fruits, cancer risk may be reduced.

The Gastroenterological Society of Australia has suggested the following general guidelines for screening patients in an attempt to reduce cancer incidence:

01

Average risk patient (no family history of cancer). Consideration should be given to yearly stool check for blood from the age of 50 and five yearly flexible sigmoidoscopy / colonoscopy.

02

Those with one first degree relative with bowel cancer diagnosed at 50 years or older - risk is two fold (first degree relative = mother, father, brother or sister): Yearly stool check for blood from the age of 40 and sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy every five years from the age of 40.

03

Those with two first degree relatives with bowel cancer or one first degree relative with bowel cancer diagnosed under the age of 50 years - risk is six fold. Colonoscopy is recommended every 3 - 5 years starting at the age of 35 - 40 or at ten years younger than the age of the earliest diagnosis of cancer in the family (which ever comes first). Stool blood testing should be performed annually.

04

Those with three or more relatives, with ulcerative colitis or an unusual syndrome called FAP (familial adenomatous polyposis syndrome) will need special advice.

It must be stressed that a positive stool test for blood must be followed by a full colonoscopy. If you have any symptoms that suggest bowel cancer or advanced bowel polyp formation, such as rectal bleeding or a change in bowel habit, a full colonoscopy is advised.

If you have any questions about cancer please contact your local doctor or our office on 9709 2777