



Elderly people need to be aware of colorectal cancer

By Lil Spitzer

Beckstrand Cancer Foundation

It's the ninth National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

Colorectal cancer, also known as colon cancer, is the third most common cancer found in men and women in this country. The American Cancer Society estimates almost 150,000 new cases of colon cancer in the United States for 2008.

In many cases, colon cancer can be prevented. It almost always starts with a small growth called a polyp. If the polyp is found early, doctors can remove it and stop colon cancer before it starts. Here are six lifestyle commitments that can be made to reduce the risk of colon cancer:

- Over 50? Schedule a colon cancer screening — then actually go to the appointment. More than 90 percent of colon cancer cases occur in people age 50 and older. American Cancer Society research indicates that by age 50, one in four people has polyps. Getting screened is an excellent colon cancer prevention method.

- Pay attention to family — especially family medical history. A family history of

polyps and certain cancers (such as colorectal, stomach or liver) may increase risk of colon cancer. If this is the case, testing for polyps should begin at a younger age.

- Eat a balanced diet. Diets high in fat and cholesterol, especially from animal sources, have been linked to increased colon cancer risk. High-fiber diets, however, have shown a protective effect. Incorporating fruits and vegetables into daily snacks is a great way to help maintain a balanced diet.

- Eat less than one pound of red meat each week. According to recent findings issued by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), consuming more than 18 ounces, or a little over a pound, of red meat (beef, pork, lamb and goat) each week can significantly increase the risks for developing colorectal cancer.

- Kick the habit — stop smoking today. Yes, it's a risk factor for colon cancer, too. When inhaled or swallowed, tobacco smoke transports carcinogens to the colon. Tobacco use appears to increase polyp size, as well.

- Get moving — maintain an active lifestyle. Research from the American Cancer

Society indicates that exercising can reduce colon cancer risk by as much as 40 percent. Exercise also tends to reduce the incidence of other risk factors for colon cancer, such as obesity and diabetes. While obesity raises the risk of colon cancer in both men and women, the link seems to be stronger in men.

Not only will these modifications help reduce the risk of colon cancer, they will also result in a healthier lifestyle. New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that colorectal cancer testing in the United States has been rising steadily since 2002, a sign of slow but encouraging progress in the fight against a cancer that's largely curable when caught early, and can even be prevented in some cases. For more information about cancer prevention, visit www.Beckstrand.org.

Lil Spitzer is the executive director of Beckstrand Cancer Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1974 specializing in the treatment and care of cancer patients. For more information, visit www.Beckstrand.org.

