

Don't push off your colonoscopy  
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March marks colorectal cancer awareness month, a good reminder to schedule a colonoscopy and keep an eye on your overall health.

Colorectal cancer is now the leading cause of cancer deaths for men under 50, and number two for women under 50, according to [Fight Colorectal Cancer](#), a colorectal cancer patient advocacy group.

The [American Cancer Society \(ACS\)](#) estimates that nearly 107,000 new cases of colon cancer will happen in 2024, and just over 46,000 new cases of rectal cancer will occur. The ACS says the rates of people being diagnosed with colon or rectal cancer have dropped since the mid-1980s due to people getting screened and people changing their lifestyles.

But, in people younger than 55, rates have increased 1-2% each year since the mid-1990s. Because of this, newer health guidance from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends people start getting colonoscopies at 45.

Yvette Blancas, a registered nurse in the gastrointestinal lab at OSF HealthCare, says the procedure is not something to push off.

"A lot of times after patients have had their colonoscopies, they wake up after their procedure and sedation, and they're like 'it wasn't that bad!' We'd like them to spread the word to their family and friends because it really isn't. People just push it off for so long and then they just forget about it," Blancas says.

To get ready for a colonoscopy, the prep work begins the day before.

"We don't want you to have any solid food the day before. We usually allow a clear liquid diet. You'll start taking your prep medication, that might be in liquid form or pill, depending on your doctor. You will likely use the washroom frequently, but the more you go the better," Blancas says. "The procedure itself takes 20-30 minutes. You wake up and recovery takes another 20-30 minutes. We just make sure your vitals are stable, you tolerate some snacks, and then if everything is OK, you're good to go!"

Colonoscopies prevent colon cancer by finding polyps and early signs of colorectal cancer when there are more treatment options.

Blancas says to make sure you're speaking with your primary care team and encourage your family and friends to stay on top of their health.

Aside from colonoscopies, OSF HealthCare offers other options to get screened like CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy), stool DNA test, fecal immunochemical test (FIT) and fecal occult blood test (FOBT). To learn more about these options, head to the [OSF HealthCare website here](#).