

Colon and rectal cancers are on the rise in America, and at an alarming rate for younger adults. According to the American Cancer Society, since 1994 colon and rectal cancers have increased 51% among adults under the age of 50.

These concerning numbers have prompted a shift in screening recommendations. Now the group says people should start screening tests for colon and rectal cancers at age 45, rather than 50, which was its previous recommendation.

According to Dr. Omar Khokhar, an OSF HealthCare Gastroenterologist, these changes reflect what he and his colleagues see in practice.

“I think it’s a relevant change. It captures what we are seeing,” said Dr. Khokhar. “Anecdotally I have seen patients in their early 30s now with colon cancer or rectal cancer, so I think it’s important that we start to get involved and start intervening earlier to capture those folks earlier to prevent more cancer from being diagnosed.”

These screenings don’t have to be intimidating. The gold standard in colorectal cancer screening is a colonoscopy. However, patients can also choose one of several other non-invasive tests, including home stool tests available by prescription.

Dr. Khokhar says to talk to your doctor about your options. And while speaking about stool can be a tricky topic for many patients, it shouldn’t be.

“Think about the poop emoji. I mean, we’ve got poop emojis everywhere now. You see it on t-shirts, pillows, it’s in your iPhone, and so, let’s talk about poop. Poop is important. It’s important to poop often, regularly, and if something is wrong with your poop, talk to your doctor.”

And you shouldn’t limit your questions to your physician. When it comes to colon and rectal cancer and screening recommendations, knowing your family history is important to help with early detection.

“It may be worthwhile at Thanksgiving or a family reunion to talk about, hey – has anyone ever had polyps in our family? Because if your parents have polyps, that’s actually an indication that you should be screened even earlier.”

While family history can’t be changed, there are some lifestyle choices that could lessen your risk. Dr. Kohkhar recommends limiting red meat intake, increasing servings of fruits and veggies, and staying at a healthy weight.

To learn more about OSF Medical Group's Gastroenterology team and screenings available, click [here](#).