

Ring in the New Year with Health Screenings

The confetti is cleaned up and the New Year is underway. As we get our footing in 2019, millions of people are now working on their resolutions, with some of the most popular goals centering on starting or improving healthy habits.

Each year some of the most popular resolutions focus on eating healthy, losing weight and quitting smoking or alcohol use. While all of these are important goals that reduce cancer risks, many forget to add preventative exams and screenings to their resolution roll calls.

Dr. Omar Khokhar is a Gastroenterologist at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington. He says simple screenings can save lives, especially when it comes to colon cancer. He suggests a simple conversation with your primary care provider to get the ball rolling.

“Everything we know about medicine now is being proactive,” said Dr. Khokhar. “The days of getting sick and then going to the doctor are behind us now. It’s about being proactive, looking ahead and doing things today that are going to ward off illness and sickness down the road. The best way to do that is getting screened. And in this particular case with colon cancer, it’s a completely preventable cancer, so why not get screened?”

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.

“If you are 50 years old today and you haven’t been screened, you should be screened. And now the new guidelines from the American Cancer Society actually say age 45,” explained Dr. Khokhar. “That’s a discussion you should have with your family doctor about whether you want to get screened earlier. But I think that we really need to focus on those two numbers: if you are 50 and you haven’t been screened, you’re overdue. And if you’re 45, it’s at least worth a conversation.”

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. However, don’t limit your questions to your physician. When it comes to cancer screening recommendations, knowing your family history is important to help with early detection.

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