

## **SCRIPT – PRINT - Colon Cancer in Younger Adults**

### **Doctors see a shift in from older adults to people under 55**

According to the American Cancer Society, the overall rate of colon cancer declined by 3.6 percent annually among adults 55 and older from 2007 to 2016. That's the good news. But during the same period of time, that number increased by 2 percent among people under the age of 55.

Excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the country. The American Cancer Society estimates 104,610 new cases of colon cancer this year alone.

“We are seeing it in younger patients in their 40s and 50s where a decade ago it was more in the 60s and 70s,” said Dr. Shylendra Sreenivasappa, oncologist, OSF HealthCare. “This is a trend that has been gradually increasing over the last few years.”

Opinions vary on the reasons why younger people are being diagnosed at a younger age. Some epidemiologists believe that diet, too much red meat, and obesity are to blame.

Another factor may be ignoring symptoms or dismissing them as something less serious. Symptoms include left side abdominal pain, constipation, and blood in the stool or any change to stool size. Fatigue and anemia are other possible factors to share with your physician.

“The key in the cancer world would be to catch the cancer before the occurrence of symptoms,” said Dr. Shylendra Sreenivasappa, oncologist, OSF HealthCare. “The key aspect of that would be to try and start doing colonoscopies and according to the American Cancer Society’s recommendations the age of colonoscopy previously was starting at age 50 and now the recommendation is to start at age 45.”

Family history also plays a role, according to Dr. Sreenivasappa, hence the reason for early testing. Still, there are plenty of other lifestyle changes that can and should take place in order to prevent a colon cancer diagnosis.

“Prevention of colon cancer is very possible,” said Dr. Shylendra Sreenivasappa, oncologist, OSF HealthCare. “There is a large amount of literature to support this. Decrease in red meat consumption decrease the risk of colon cancer. Increase exercise again decrease the risk of colon cancer. More green leafy vegetables in your diet decreases the risk of colon cancer. I think these are the three big preventive measures that you can do to help prevent colon cancer from occurring.”

The bottom line is pay attention to possible warning signs. Don't ignore symptoms and don't delay a visit to your doctor, regardless of your age.

“The most important take home message is the earlier we find colon cancer the better the chance we can cure the colon cancer,” said Dr. Shylendra Sreenivasappa, oncologist, OSF HealthCare.

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