

## Early Cancer Detection

Over a half million Americans will die of cancer this year. If found early there is a 90% chance of survival but if diagnosed late this drops to 10%. Screening tests as recommended by the American Cancer Society have significantly reduced death rate from many kinds of cancer. We only have a chance to fight cancer when we see it early. Unfortunately certain types such as ovary and pancreas are more difficult to detect early and therefore have much worse outcome once discovered.

Periodic physical exam for both men and women should start at age 20 and become more frequent as one gets older. A careful physical can detect cancer of the thyroid, mouth and tongue, skin, testes, lymph glands and possibly ovaries. Women should start having yearly mammogram at age 40 in addition to clinical breast exam. For those at high risk, MRI mammogram is indicated. Colon cancer screening should start at age 50 for both men and women and be repeated with colonoscopy every 10 years, sooner if polyps are found. If there is a close family member who had colon cancer before age 60 colonoscopy should start even earlier. Cancer of the cervix can be detected by routine yearly Pap smear starting at age 21 or earlier 3 years after becoming sexually active. The HPV vaccine is recommended for females 9-26 years old to prevent cervical cancer. The Pap smear can actually be done every 2 years if the newer liquid-based Pap test is used. By age 30 if 3 annual Pap smears in a row are normal the frequency can be reduced to every 2-3 years. If the HPV DNA test is done then every 3 years is adequate instead of yearly. Pap Smears usually can stop at age 70 if normal since age 60 and 3 years in a row. Men should have both PSA blood test and rectal exam done every year starting at age 50 for early detection of prostate cancer. This actually should start at age 45 if a man's father or brother was diagnosed with prostate cancer before age 65 or there is other strong family history.

An ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure. Take good care of yourself.

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