

I **CHARLOTTE** HEALTHCARE LEADERS I

AGE SEX

If You're Turning 50 or Older This Year, It's Time to Schedule Your Colonoscopy

Colon cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, but when caught early, it has a more than 90 percent survival rate.

In 2017, an estimated 135,000 Americans were diagnosed with colon cancer; more than 50,000 died from it. That's the bad news. The good news is that, while colorectal cancer is still the third most commonly diagnosed cancer, the annual number of diagnoses among adults over the age of 50 has steadily declined over the last several decades. It's also one of the few cancers that can be prevented entirely.

"The decrease in overall mortality due to colon cancer since the 1990s is directly attributable to screening techniques," says Vinaya Maddukuri, MD, of Charlotte Gastroenterology and Hepatology (CGH). Maddukuri is one of 22 comprehensively trained and board-certified gastroenterologists working for the group, which has earned a reputation for providing the highest quality, most compassionate care in the region. "The current guidelines do suggest getting your first colonoscopy at age 50 if not before."

People with a family history or other risk factors, he adds, may be advised to begin screening earlier.

About Charlotte Gastroenterology and Hepatology

CGH offers five conveniently located treatment centers in the Charlotte area. Its team of physicians and nurses pride themselves on the top-quality, personalized attention given to each patient and

on working hard to make themselves accessible and responsive to patient needs.

In addition to colonoscopies, practice physicians perform all major GI procedures, including endoscopies, endoscopic ultrasounds, endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography, and infusion therapy. They see patients every day who suffer from Celiac disease, Crohn's disease, diverticulitis, irritable bowel syndrome, and other GI and GI-related illnesses and diseases.

CGH also has one of the largest gastrointestinal research centers in the Carolinas, and patients frequently participate in national research studies.

Outpatient Procedure

One of the most important things to know about the colonoscopy procedure, according to Rebecca E. Rawl, MD, MPH, at Charlotte Gastroenterology & Hepatology's Randolph Road office, is that it is neither painful nor unpleasant.

"Patients are sedated to eliminate or minimize any discomfort, and the procedure lasts only 30 to 60 minutes. Colonoscopies are performed in our outpatient clinic," she explains. "Should polyps—benign growths that have the potential to develop into cancerous tissue—be found during a colonoscopy, they can be removed easily, eliminating the possibility that they could become cancerous, which is why screening is so important. So if you're turning 50 this year, do yourself a favor and schedule a colonoscopy."

In its early stages, colon cancer generally has no symptoms and gives no warnings. In its later stages, symptoms could include:

- A change in bowel function (diarrhea, constipation, or changes in shape or texture of stool)
- A constant feeling of needing to have a bowel movement
- Abdominal pain
- Unexplained weight loss
- Blood in the stool (dark colored stool)
- Rectal bleeding with bright red blood
- Weakness and fatigue

The American Cancer Society recommends the following to reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat healthy food such as vegetables, fruits, fish, and lean meats
- Remain physically active
- Avoid tobacco products
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Get a colonoscopy if you have symptoms or when you turn 50



**CHARLOTTE
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