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Colorectal cancer:

How to prevent the preventable

Colorectal cancer is one of the most preventable cancers— and yet it's also the second leading cause of cancer deaths. Why? The alarming fact is that only 20 per cent of Ontarians go through screening for this cancer where they can get a chance to beat it in its early stages.

The Ontario government is introducing a five-year, \$193.5 million colorectal cancer screening program— the first of its kind in Canada— to encourage more people over the age of 50 to be screened for this deadly disease.

If you are 50 or over, you need to discuss with your family physician or health care provider the risks associated with colon cancer," said Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman. "Our government is committed, through this type of education campaign and investment, to reducing the number of deaths associated with colon cancer before they start."

In 2006, about 7,500 Ontarians were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and 3,100 people died from it.

But this high death rate can be lowered drastically if more people get screened. That's because there's a 90 per cent chance of colorectal cancer being cured when it's caught early enough.

Anyone over the age of 50 should seriously consider being screened. The urgency to do this increases dramatically, if you also have a family history of colorectal cancer.

If you are over 50 and have a family history, you should talk to your doctor about being screened. Your doctor may refer you to have a colonoscopy— a procedure that

involves looking at the lining of the bowel for cancerous polyps by using a thin flexible tube with a tiny camera attached.

A colonoscopy usually takes no more than an hour, and sedative and pain medicine keeps you from feeling too much discomfort. Full recovery by the next day is normal, allowing for a return to regular activities.

If you are over 50 but don't have a family history, your doctor may advise you to have a fecal occult blood test.

This is a simple test that can be done in the privacy of your own home. You will be asked to follow some dietary restrictions leading up to and during the test. The test itself involves applying small amounts of stool to a cardboard slide at three different times. You then send the stool samples to a laboratory.

If you test positive for the fecal occult blood test, you then undergo further screening through a colonoscopy.

Unfortunately, only 10 per cent of Ontarians over the age of 50 have received this blood test.

The effect of these undiagnosed cases will only worsen with our growing and aging population since it's expected there will be over four million people in the province over the age of 50 by 2012.

Most know that eating well and regular exercise can help keep you healthy after turning 50.

Routine check-ups, such as being screened for colorectal cancer, are another important way to ensure many happy and healthy years to come.

—News Canada

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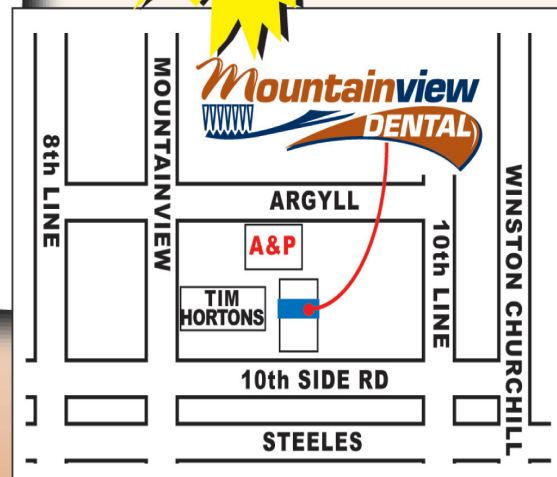
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