For more information about colorectal cancer, please see:
http://www.doh.wa.gov/colorectal

For cancer data, please see:
http://www3.doh.wa.gov/wscr

Washington State Department of Health
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Colorectal Cancer
in Washington State

Stories of Survival

Every year, about 3,000 Washington residents are diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Here are the stories of four of those 3,000.

Facts about colorectal cancer

- Colorectal cancer kills about 1,000 Washingtonians a year.
- Colorectal cancer affects women and men of all races.
- Over 90% of all colorectal cancers are diagnosed in people age 50 and older.
- Regular screening can prevent colorectal cancer by finding and removing pre-cancerous growths before they develop into cancer.
- Screening can also find cancer early, when treatment works best.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in Washington state.

Preventing colorectal cancer

- The American Cancer Society recommends a diet that includes at least five servings of fruit and vegetables every day and six servings of foods from other plant sources, such as grain products, rice or beans.
- Regular physical activity may reduce risk for colorectal cancer.
- Talk to your doctor if you have a family history of colorectal cancer. You may be at increased risk.

If you're over 50, regular screening is the best way to prevent colorectal cancer.

Screening for colorectal cancer

- There are many screening tests available to prevent and detect colorectal cancer.
- Many insurance plans, including Medicare, help pay for colorectal cancer screening.
- You and your health care provider can decide which screening tests are appropriate for you.

Through screening, growths can be detected and removed before they become cancerous.

Common symptoms of colorectal cancer

- Change in bowel habits
- Abdominal pain
- Change in appetite
- Blood in stool
- Unexplained weight loss

Colorectal cancer may start with *no symptoms*. That's why screening tests are so important.

Talking through Embarrassment

One brisk October morning, an intense pain in her abdomen sent Dede to the hospital.

"When I found out the next morning it was colon cancer, I was really surprised," said Dede. "It was scary to know that this cancer grew in my colon and spread without warning."

> "Knowing you're healthy is worth a few moments of embarrassment."

When Dede's father had colorectal cancer, "We didn't talk about it," Dede recalled. "And, 20 years ago, colon cancer didn't seem like a health issue about which I should worry."

If her father's diagnosis was not a red flag for her, Dede's experience is a warning to her five grown children. "I want my family and friends to be aware of the ways to prevent this cancer."

"It seems we're still hung up on discussing these parts of the body. It's a source of embarrassment, and we need to get past that," Dede said. "A colorectal cancer screening and knowing you're healthy is worth a few moments of embarrassment and discomfort. These tests are a gift to us all."

Listening to Your Body

When Gayle noticed rectal bleeding, she went to the doctor right away. Since rectal bleeding is a common symptom of colorectal cancer, her doctor ordered some important tests. Fortunately for Gayle, her colon cancer was diagnosed in an early stage when the cancer was highly treatable and curable.

She knows she is fortunate. "All my doctors tell me I'm lucky. . .it could have been so much worse, if I had ignored my symptoms."

Gayle's experience with colon cancer is a warning to men and women of all ages:

> "Just do it!"

Pay attention to changes in your body and report unusual symptoms to your physician. A year after she noticed the bleeding, Gayle is cancer free, starting several home improvement projects and planning a trip to Disneyland with her two youngest children. Life has returned to normal.

Gayle is enthusiastic about colorectal cancer screening: "Just do it! We cannot afford to be ashamed to talk about this disease and the ways to prevent it."

Screening. . .To Save Your Life

Robin knows first hand the importance of being screened for colorectal cancer. Like most people, he had no symptoms prior to his screening test. "I was pretty resistant at first; I thought it was a waste of time, and it seemed invasive, painful for someone in good health."

> "I'm proof that screening saves lives."

Five years after a screening test found the baseball-size tumor, Robin is cancer free. People who have no cancer recurrence for five years are considered cured.

Recently, Robin took a moment to reflect on his initial resistance to getting screened for colorectal cancer. Nodding thoughtfully with chin in hand, he said: "I now see it as my obligation to raise the public's consciousness about screening tests that can pinpoint what is a treatable—and even curable—disease."

"I'm proof that screening saves lives. If my story encourages someone who unsuspectingly has polyps or colorectal cancer to get screened, I'd be very, very pleased."

Dancing for Joy

I expect that it's hard enough to hear you have cancer in the best of times and with family close by," said Trane, explaining that she lived in a Seattle women's shelter at the time of her diagnosis. "From diagnosis to treatment to recovery, I learned that I am my main strength."

In the days after Trane's diagnosis, lab reports confirmed she had late stage cancer. It had probably been developing silently in her body for more than 10 years.

> "I am my main strength."

Without self-pity in her voice, she said, "Yes, there were times when I despaired. And, I prayed. Prayer left me feeling strengthened; it put something back in the spine."

"I'm not a person who goes into denial, but someone who takes on adversity, and tries hard to turn it around," she said. "Colorectal cancer is a very survivable disease if caught early. And if we could get all the people screened who should be screened for colorectal cancer, I'd be dancing for joy."

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