

Colon Cancer Prevention by Urvish Shah, MD

Out of the four major cancers (lung, breast, prostate and colon), **colon cancer** is **the only** cancer that is **completely preventable** in most individuals. This is mainly because it starts as a precancerous lesion (adenoma) which is benign and is removable before it turns to cancer.

The term SCREENING is applied for detection of cancers like lung, breast and prostate. For colon cancer, PREVENTION is the main aim. Colonoscopies focus on finding and removing polyps and preventing and reducing rates of colon cancer.

Propofol induced sedation has made colonoscopy much more tolerable for patients and thus, much more acceptable. Higher definition colonoscopes have made it easier for vigilant and experienced gastroenterologists to identify and remove subtle but aggressive precancerous polyps called Sessile Serrated Adenomas (SSA). SSAs occur much more commonly in women, are mostly located in the proximal colon, are very aggressive, can be easily missed by inexperienced or untrained eyes, and are mainly responsible for interval colon cancers (cancers occurring between the colonoscopies).

Newer preparations (e.g., Suprep, Clenpiq, and Moviprep) for colonoscopies have much lesser volumes, improved taste and are better tolerated by patients. Split dose preparations are used for optimal cleansing of the proximal colon where most subtle SSAs usually occur and can be easily missed with suboptimal cleansing.

“Cold” method (avoiding use of cautery) of polypectomy for polyps has been shown to reduce the rate of post-polypectomy bleeding and perforations.

In our experience at Oaklawn Hospital (and shared by most endoscopists in Michigan), Cologuard false positivity is extremely high, leading to severe patient anxiety and unnecessary additional expenses. In our experience, Cologuard false negativity is also very high, resulting in lack of follow-up treatment in most false negative patients unless they have severe symptoms like bleeding or anemia. Thus, I strongly recommend against the use of Cologuard from our collective experience, unless the patient absolutely refuses or is not suitable for a colonoscopy.

Remember, the only way to prevent colon cancer is to find and remove every single adenomatous colon polyp from the entire colon, and only colonoscopies provide that opportunity.