

Colon cancer still robbing lives

Simple test can reduce risk by more than half

Screening colonoscopies may reduce the risk of new, late-stage cancer by 70 percent, according to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania.

NINE OUT OF 10 CASES of colorectal cancer — also known as colon cancer, rectal cancer, or bowel cancer — are found in people age 50 and older, according to the American Cancer Society. However, colon cancer can affect anyone. Kim Harris started having problems with bloating and going to the bathroom when she was 48.

"I knew something wasn't right," Harris says.

Harris had a colonoscopy performed by Lisa Perryman, MD, a board-certified and fellowship-trained colon and rectal



Dr. Lisa Perryman

surgeon at Parker Adventist Hospital. A malignant tumor was found, and Harris underwent surgery and chemotherapy shortly thereafter.

"A colonoscopy can save your life," says Harris, whose cancer was found early, thanks to a colonoscopy.

A Lifesaving Procedure

Colorectal cancer affects one out of 20 Americans and is the third most deadly cancer in the United States. It is also one of the most preventable cancers, Perryman says.

"Undergoing regular screenings can significantly reduce your risk of colon cancer," Perryman says. "Unlike other screenings like mammograms, colonoscopy can actually prevent you from getting cancer since polyps can be removed during the procedure."

Polyps are precancerous growths within the lining of the colon that can become cancerous if not removed. Colonoscopy uses a thin, flexible tube with a camera to examine the entire colon and a portion of the small intestine.

Colonoscopy reduces the occurrence of colorectal cancer by nearly half, when compared to other screenings, according to research in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.



Kim Harris celebrates her cancer-free life with her husband, David, and dogs Bear and Darla.

A colonoscopy to screen for colorectal cancer is recommended once every 10 years starting at age 50, or earlier if you have any of these risk factors:

- > History of colon polyps, inflammatory bowel disease, or specific cancers
- > Family history of colorectal cancer or polyps
- > Inherited diseases like Lynch syndrome
- > African-American
- > Obese, physically inactive, a smoker, or a heavy drinker

"Your physician can recommend when and how frequently you should be screened if you are at higher risk of developing colon cancer," Perryman says. "In addition, to lower your risk, eat a diet high in fiber and low in fat, avoid smoking, limit alcohol use, and eat red meats in moderation."

And listen to your body, adds Harris, who is adopted and does not know her family history. Harris went back to work six weeks after her surgery and is now enjoying life cancer-free with her husband, three children, and two grandchildren. 🐾

WARNING SIGNS of colon cancer

- ✓ Changes in bowel habits
- ✓ Rectal bleeding or bloody stools
- ✓ Persistent bloating, cramps, or gas
- ✓ Inability to empty bowel completely

If you have any of these symptoms, contact your physician immediately.

Are you at risk for developing colorectal cancer?

Learn more about how to reduce your risk at a **FREE** seminar on Tuesday, March 3, at noon. See back cover for details.