

Dispelling Myths About Colorectal Cancer

MYTH #1

A colonoscopy is painful.

Fact: The standard sedation that accompanies a colonoscopy makes the procedure itself something you usually will not feel or remember at all.

MYTH #2

If I'm young, I won't get colorectal cancer.

Fact: New data suggests an increase in the incidence of colorectal cancer in young people that may be related to environmental factors. If you have a strong family history of colonic polyps or colon cancer, you might need to be screened in your 20s.

MYTH #3

Preparing for a colonoscopy is uncomfortable.

Fact: Many people say preparing for a colonoscopy is uncomfortable because it involves drinking a lot of fluid. Many hospitals, including Stanford, have moved to a cleansing process that does not involve drinking as much fluid.

MYTH #4

If I don't have colon cancer symptoms, I don't have cancer.

Fact: Early colon cancers and polyps that can develop into cancer often produce no symptoms.

MYTH #5

If I have a family history of colon cancer, I will develop the disease, too.

Fact: Not everyone who inherits a genetic cancer risk will develop cancer. The human genome has 23,000 genes, with the role of many genes and mutations still unidentified. Scientists believe that environmental factors may also play a role.

MYTH #6

I can't do anything to avoid developing colon cancer.

Fact: Colon cancer is largely preventable through timely screening, a healthy diet and exercise, avoidance of smoking and excess weight.

MYTH #7

If I have colon cancer, I will end up with a colostomy bag.

Fact: Often, if the cancer is caught early, surgery to remove the cancerous portion of the colon will not require a colostomy bag.