



45 is the new 50! Get Screened For Colon Cancer

Here in Nebraska, rates of colorectal cancer diagnosis and death are higher compared to the United States overall. In fact, nearly 3800 Nebraskans were diagnosed with colorectal cancers in the 4-year period of 2015-2018.

This is why anyone age 45 and older should get screened and continue screening on a regular basis. Colon cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable, but you need to get screened so that cancer can be identified early, when treatments are more successful.

According to the [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services](#), Nebraska ranks 41st in the nation for screening rates. Rural communities are most concerning because often people aren't getting screened or they get screened too late.

The good news? Screening for colorectal cancer saves lives. If everyone ages 45 and older were screened regularly, 6 out of 10 deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented.

Screening identifies polyps or cancer in the colon or rectum. A polyp is an extra piece of tissue that grows inside your body. One place a polyp can grow is in the large intestine (colon is another name for large intestine). Most polyps are not dangerous. However, some polyps may turn into cancer or already be cancer. You might not have symptoms, so, without screening, changes may be taking place that you don't know about.

However, if you begin to notice blood in or on your stool, have stomach pain, aches, cramps that don't go away or are losing weight without knowing why, this may indicate problems with the colon and should be checked by your medical provider.

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) now recommends regular screening for colorectal cancers beginning at age 45. There are several types of screening tests, including stool (fecal) tests - such as the FIT screening test for colon cancer – as well as screening tests called flexible sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy. Colonoscopy is considered the “gold standard”.

The FIT is an easy at home test where you collect small stool samples on a card and send to a lab. This screening should be done once a year. Sigmoidoscopy is a procedure done by the doctor to look for polyps or cancer in the rectum and lower third of the colon. It is done every 5 years. If positive results are found on either FIT or sigmoidoscopy screening tests, you will probably need a colonoscopy to look for and remove polyps.

Colonoscopy is a procedure done by the doctor that looks for polyps or cancer in the rectum and the entire colon. Colonoscopy is done every 10 years or as advised by your medical provider.

There is no single test that is the ‘right’ one for everyone. Again, the gold standard is colonoscopy, but “The best test is the one that gets done!” Our advice is to talk with your medical provider about the

benefits and risks of each screening option, as well as your family history, personal risk factors and preferences, to help determine which screening test is best for you.

Most insurance plans, including Medicare, help pay for colorectal cancer screening. So, check with your health insurance provider to learn more about your colorectal cancer screening benefits. If you don't have insurance that covers colonoscopy, contact your health department for assistance with resources and options for screening.

In addition to getting regular screenings for cancer when you are 45 or older, consider taking some of these steps to lower your risk of colorectal cancer:

1. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains from breads, cereals, nuts, and beans.
2. Eat a low-fat diet.
3. Eat foods with folate such as leafy green vegetables. A daily multivitamin containing 0.4 milligrams of folic acid may also be helpful.
4. If you use alcohol, drink only in moderation.
5. If you use tobacco, quit. If you don't use tobacco, don't start.
6. Exercise for at least 20 minutes three to four days each week. Moderate exercise such as walking, gardening, or climbing steps may help reduce your risk.

South Heartland District Health Department is offering free FIT colorectal cancer screening kits to complete at home. If you have not had any colorectal cancer screening in the past year, you may request a FREE screening kit by calling the South Heartland District Health Department at 402-462-6211 (toll free at 1-877-238-7595).

Don't put it off, make a commitment today to get screened for colorectal cancer and take measures to lower your risk!

For more information on colorectal cancer, visit the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention website (<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/index.htm>) or the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program website (<https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Nebraska-Colon-Cancer-Screening-Program.aspx>). A personal colon cancer risk assessment tool is available at (www.cancer.gov/colorectalcancerrisk/).

Michele Bever is the executive director for South Heartland District Health Department, serving Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties in Nebraska. She may be reached at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.

