

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness

“Don’t assume,” is the Colorectal Cancer Alliance’s 2019 National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month public awareness campaign.

Don’t assume you’re too young for colorectal cancer, and if you get it, don’t assume you’re alone. Most of all, don’t assume your support isn’t needed to put an end to this deadly disease.

Colorectal cancer is the third-most common cancer diagnosed in both American men and women, and the second-leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. The goal for the month of March is to challenge the assumptions and misconceptions by dispelling myths, raising awareness and connecting people across the country with information and support.

The good news, according to Dr. Faris AL-Gebory, general surgeon at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital, is that colorectal cancer can be easily prevented.

“It’s very preventable if people follow a healthy diet program, starting when they’re young, and stay on it for the rest of their lives,” he said. “It’s also very preventable if you can have a colonoscopy at the age of 50, if you don’t have any family history of colon cancer. Sometimes they have to do it earlier, say at the age of 20, if they have genetic colon cancer.”

Since coming to Lawrence County Memorial Hospital in October, colonoscopies and other colon surgeries have kept AL-Gebory busy in the state-of-the-art surgical center.

“Every week I do three or four colonoscopies, at a minimum,” he said. “I’ve also done several colon cancer surgeries here at the hospital, and all of them have been successful.”

Unfortunately, AL-Gebory predicts that colorectal cancer will continue to be prevalent in American society.

“It’s going to get worse because exposure to radiation, and because the food we eat isn’t healthy,” he said. “Our vegetables have a lot of pesticides and fertilizer. And people who eat the kind of meat we eat, especially red meat, are more prone for colon cancer.”

March was first dedicated as National Colorectal Cancer Awareness month in February of 2000 by President Bill Clinton. Since then it has grown to be a rallying point for the colon cancer community, where thousands of patients, survivors, caregivers and advocates from coast to coast join together to spread awareness by wearing blue, holding fund raising and education events, talking to friends and family about screening and more.

Health officials stress that when it comes to colorectal cancer, early detection is vital. According to the American Cancer Society, more than 1,000,000 Americans count themselves among survivors. Knowing the causes and risk factors could make you one of them.

Among the factors that can be controlled are:

- Diet: Studies show that diets rich in red and processed meats may contribute to colorectal cancer risks. Also, how we prepare our proteins may increase risk. Grilling, frying and high-temperature cooking release chemicals that may contribute to the colorectal cancer risks. Diets full of fruits, vegetables and whole grains reduce the risk of colon cancer, as well as other health risks.

- Exercise: Sedentary lifestyles and obesity are to more risk factors for colorectal cancer. Once again, physical activity helps to reduce the risk factor for another disease.

- Smoking and heavy alcohol use: Quit one and limit the other. Ask your physician if you need help with either one.

- Family history: While you can’t control this, you can know it. Report it to your primary care physician so if your family history shows an increased risk for you, he or she can decide early screening.

Those with specific concerns about colorectal can reach Al-Gebory’s office by contacting the hospital at 943-1000.