

## COLORECTAL CANCER: MYTHS AND REALITIES

**MYTH:** *There is nothing I can do about getting colorectal cancer.*

**REALITY:** Colorectal cancer can be prevented. Screening tests can detect polyps (grape-like growths on the lining of the colon or rectum) that can turn into cancer. Removing these polyps can prevent colorectal cancer from ever occurring. **Starting at age 50, men and women who are at average risk should be screened regularly for colorectal cancer. New research shows that African Americans should begin screening at age 45. Men and women who are at high risk of the disease because of personal and family medical history may need to be tested earlier and should talk with their health care professional about when.**

**MYTH:** *Colorectal cancer is usually fatal.*

**REALITY:** Colorectal cancer is usually curable when detected early. More than 90 percent of patients with localized colorectal cancer confined to the colon or rectum are live five years after diagnosis.

**MYTH:** *Colorectal cancer is a disease of older, white men.*

**REALITY:** An equal number of women and men get colorectal cancer. An estimated 73,470 women and 71,820 men were diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2005. African-Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with colorectal cancer at later stages of the disease, and at a younger age.

**MYTH:** *Screening tests are necessary only for individuals who have symptoms.*

**REALITY:** Since symptoms of colorectal cancer are often silent, it is important to get screened regularly. Screenings test for a disease even if the patient has no symptoms. About 75 percent of all new cases of colorectal cancer occur in individuals with no known risk factors for the disease, other than being 50 or older. If you have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, polyps or inflammatory bowel disease you may need to be screened before age 50. Talk with your health care professional.

**March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Colorectal cancer is preventable, and is easy to treat and often curable when detected early. Talk with your health care professional about colorectal cancer today.**