

Screening methods that can detect cancer early

Cancer does not discriminate based on race, gender or age, and many people have been or know someone who has been diagnosed with this potentially deadly disease.

Cancer is often unpredictable, but many cancers can be found in the early stages before they have had the chance to metastasize. In many instances, the earlier cancer is detected, the more treatable it is, according to the American Cancer Society.

People often wonder what they can do to protect themselves against cancer. Routine screenings are one of the most effective ways to combat cancer.

What is a cancer screening?

The National Cancer Institute says cancer screenings check for cancer in people who have no symptoms. Common cancer screenings include colonoscopies, sigmoidoscopies, mammograms, Pap tests, visual skin examinations, and any preventative visual or tactile examinations of parts of the body for lumps and abnormalities.

Other screening tests can include specific blood tests, such as Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) for prostate cancer, CA-125 for ovarian cancer and the alpha-fetoprotein blood test used in conjunction with an ultrasound to detect liver cancer.

Cancer screenings are not always part of annual physicals. However, doctors may suggest screenings based on patients' family histories or other risk factors. In addition, some doctors may recommend cancer screenings as their patients age, as age is one of the biggest risk factors for many cancers.

How people can be health advocates

There are more than 200 types of cancer that can cause many different symptoms, advises



Cancer Research UK. It is not possible to know them all, but generally people are good at recognizing when they're feeling normal and when they're exhibiting symptoms that suggest something is awry. Knowing oneself and knowing when something seems strange can help men and women advocate for their own health.

Individuals should feel comfortable addressing their concerns with a physician and asking if screening methods or other tests may be applicable in certain situations.

Other cancer tests

Because screening and testing comes with certain risks and the possibility for false positives or negatives, not to mention sometimes exorbitant costs, patients and doctors often discuss the pros and cons of cancer screenings before going forward with the tests. Imaging procedures may be used in conjunction with lab tests to rule out certain cancers.

Such procedures include:

- CT scan: an x-ray image of internal organs
- nuclear scan (radionuclide scan): a specialized radioactive scan to create pictures of bones and organs
- ultrasound: use of radio waves to map out internal images
- PET scan: use of a tracer injection to map how tissues are working, among other tests

Doctors may also recommend biopsies, which remove a small portion of tissue to test for cancer.

Men and women curious about cancer screenings should consult with their doctors and ask pertinent questions about potential side effects, preparing for screenings and interpreting the results. Taking charge of one's health can help catch cancer in its earliest stages.

10 MOST COMMON CANCERS IN THE U.S.

- Skin
- Lung
- Breast
- Prostate
- Colorectal
- Bladder
- Melanoma
- Lymphoma
- Kidney
- Leukemia

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