

Convenient Colonoscopy Service at St. Mary's Hospital of Superior

By Theresa Smith, MD
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March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month, but I emphasize the value of colonoscopy screenings to my patients year-round. I have performed thousands of these procedures over the course of my career as a gastroenterologist with SMDC Health System. Each screening has the potential to help save a life.

Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. By following your doctor's recommendation for regular screenings, colon cancers can be caught early, which often means a better prognosis. During a colonoscopy, I also can find and remove polyps, or growths in the colon, before they become cancerous.

The American Cancer Society recommends that most adults get their first colonoscopy at age 50. If the test is negative and you don't have other risk factors for colon cancer, you won't need another colonoscopy for 10 years.

It's important to know your family history when it comes to colon cancer. We send patients a detailed questionnaire, so they can talk to family members. If you do have a family history of this disease, your doctor may recommend you have a colonoscopy at an earlier age and possibly, more frequently.

Getting your colonoscopy doesn't need to be a hassle. Patients in Superior and Northwestern Wisconsin can enjoy the convenience of having their procedure at St. Mary's Hospital of Superior. The staff here is superb, and I often hear positive feedback from my patients.

I have been performing colonoscopies at St. Mary's in Superior for the last 13 years. I'm one of seven board-certified gastroenterologists from SMDC's Digestive Health Center, who provide services in Superior on a rotating basis. The facilities, equipment and physicians are the same as in Duluth, but it can be easier to park and find your way around in Superior. And as part of an integrated health system, we have access to SMDC genetic counselors and colorectal surgeons if necessary.

There are several screening tests for colon cancer, but colonoscopy is considered the "gold standard." In order to have the best exam possible, we ask patients to follow the instructions for preparation carefully. This process can be unpleasant, but it's important to have a really clean bowel. I want to be able to get a good look at the left and right side of the bowel – especially at subtle, flat polyps that may not be easy to spot.

Many patients say the colonoscopy itself is easier than they expected. Patients are typically under moderate sedation, which means they have been given a medication to help them relax, and are somewhat aware during the procedure.

Along with regular screenings, you can reduce your risk of colon cancer by maintaining a normal body weight and not smoking. Some early research indicates that having a normal vitamin D level also may help to decrease that risk.

If you've been putting off your colonoscopy, consider the convenience of having the procedure at St. Mary's Hospital of Superior. You can ask your primary care physician to help arrange this, or you can call (715) 395-3012 for scheduling information.