Colon Cancer
The importance of recognizing the signs, screening and prevention.

Colon Cancer is a disease of cells. It is an abnormal growth of cells which tend to proliferate in an uncontrolled way and, in some cases, to metastasize (spread). If the spread is not controlled, it can result in death. The reason for many cancers, especially those occurring during childhood remain unknown. However, known causes of cancer can be lifestyle (external) factors, tobacco use, excess body weight and non-modifiable (internal) factors such as inherited genetic mutations, hormones and immune conditions.

These risk factors may act simultaneously or in sequence to initiate and/or promote cancer growth. Ten or more years often pass between exposure to external factors and detectable cancer.

What are some signs/symptoms of colon cancer?
In the early stages of the disease, colorectal cancer symptoms may be minimal, or not present at all. As the disease progresses, symptoms may increase in quantity and degree of severity.

An easy way to remember the warning signs of colon cancer is to know your ABCP’s, which are:

A - Anemia – Symptoms include weakness, pale skin, and low blood count.
B - Blood in stool
C - Change in bowel habits – Any changes that last longer than 1-2 months and are unusual.
P - Pain in abdomen – Any unexplained pain in abdomen or rectum that has been there for 1-2 months and seems to be getting worse with time.

Who should get screened and what type of screening is usually used?
If there is no family history, then age 50 is recommended. However, if you have a family history of colon cancer, you may need to get screen before age 50. In addition, the American College of Gastroenterology recommends age 45 if you are African American.

Is a colonoscopy still the most recommended screening test?
A colonoscopy is generally the recommended screening tool. This procedure has come a long way from past treatments. There are other tests that can be completed by your primary care physician and are non-invasive and cost effective, such as:
• Barium enema
• Flexible sigmoidoscopy
• Occult blood and stool DNA samples

But, colonoscopies are generally the most effective tests since the doctor can biopsy or remove polyps at the same time.

If colon cancer is found early, what’s the prognosis?
Generally, the earlier you find colon cancer, the better long-term results you will have. The five-year relative survival rate for people with stage I colon cancer is about 92% versus stage IV which may be about 11%. But there are treatment options for later-stage cancer that can be effective.

What are common treatments for colon cancer?
Generally surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy may be used for colon cancer. Treatment is largely based on the stage of the cancer and other factors related to the individual patient. That’s why a personalized, treatment plan is best.

What kind of lifestyle changes can people make to possibly prevent colon cancer?
Obesity is a risk factor, so keeping a healthy weight through diet and exercise is extremely important.
Increase fresh fruit and vegetable intake daily.
Instead of processed meat and red meat, eat lean proteins such as turkey, chicken and fish.
Stop smoking!

As a gastroenterologist and dedicated researcher, Dr. Hendrickson has published studies in several renowned medical journals and has served as an investigator for many clinical trials to advance the treatment of emphysema, HIV, Crohn’s disease and others conditions.

These alarming numbers are current projections by The American Cancer Society. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in both men and women which is why it is important to learn about the signs, screening and prevention of colorectal cancer. Early detection and treatment is key.

What is cancer?
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9,690 New cases of colorectal cancer in 2017 in Texas
3,700 Deaths due to colorectal cancer in 2017 in Texas

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