March is Colorectal Cancer Screening Awareness Month

Colon cancer deals with a part of the body most people aren’t comfortable discussing. But the American Cancer Society reports that most colon cancers can be prevented or treated successfully if they’re found early.

Colon cancer is cancer of the lining of the lower parts of the bowel called the colon and the rectum. Risk increases with family history, age, with 90% of colorectal cancers occurring in people aged 50 and from dietary choices. Symptoms may include:

- Blood in or on the stool (bowel movement)
- Stomach pains or cramps that do not go away
- Weight loss that you can’t explain

If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your healthcare provider.

Most colon cancers start with a growth called a polyp and if found and removed early, you can prevent cancer from even occurring or beating the cancer and going on with a normal life. The good news: you have many choices of tests.

- Fecal occult blood testing (FOBT), which is a test of a stool specimen for “hidden” blood.
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy, which uses a flexible lighted tube to look at the inside walls of the rectum and part of the colon.
- Colonoscopy which also uses a flexible lighted tube to look at the inside walls of the rectum and the entire colon. During this procedure, tissue samples can be taken for further testing, and polyps may be removed.

The Good News

You may be able to lower your risk of colorectal cancer by:

- Engaging in regular physical activity
- Changing your diet to include fruits and vegetables, high fiber and low-fat
- Watching your weight, alcohol consumption and tobacco use

If you’re 50 or older or have a family history of colon or rectal cancer, make a decision and get tested. Talk to your doctor about which tests are best for you.

* Content summarized from information provided by the American Heart Association and the Mayo Clinic.