

Stand Up to the Monster

The Power of Cancer Screenings

Remember those dreadful days of childhood when “routine checkups” really meant your pediatrician was going to give you a shot? Or worse – more than one?

Despite the doctor’s, nurse’s and your mother’s attempts to console you by saying it would “all be over before you know it,” the anxiety could feel almost unbearable. In your childish mind, this was torture. How could everyone act like it was no big deal?

So you whimpered – or sobbed – and in a second or two, it was all over, just like they promised. For your bravery, you may have gotten some small reward – your badge of courage – intended to bring a smile to your red, tear-streaked face. Then out the door you went, armed against the invisible monsters of measles, mumps, polio, chickenpox and whooping cough.

As you matured, you realized two important things about those shots: (1) they really were not as bad as you had imagined; and (2) they were critical to your overall health and wellness.

Now you are an adult and your routine checkups have changed a bit. Your preventive care now includes intimate and somewhat awkward exams including those that screen for a new monster - cancer.

The truth is this: most people understand that screenings for breast, cervical, prostate and colorectal cancer are key to saving lives, but they do not regularly get them. Why? Is it because we get confused about the timing of certain types of cancer screenings? Do we put it off thinking, “*I’m not sick, so why go to the doctor?*” Is it the fear of the actual test and the temporary discomfort during the invasion of our most sacred body parts? Or are we afraid that the monster will get us?

Our reasons probably include many, if not all of these scenarios.

Remember that action gets results. A screening simply means that your doctor is taking preventive measures to check for cancer before you ever have any symptoms. And when you make your health a priority, you help defeat the monster.

Start talking about the uncomfortable subject of cancer screenings. Talk to your doctor first. Make sure you know how often to be tested, how long the procedure will take and how to ease any anxiety you may be experiencing. Then ask a trusted friend or family member to describe his or her experience with you. Although the matter is serious, you will most likely find a little humor in your discussion along with some very useful advice to prepare you for your important screening.



Then, stand up to the monster. Get screened. And encourage someone else you care about to get regular cancer screenings also - your spouse, a sibling, even parents of adult children can remind them that it will “all be over before you know it.” Your reward? Better health, and possibly your life.

For more information about breast, prostate, colorectal and cervical cancer and screenings, visit anthem.com.

SCREENING FACTS

- **Mammograms**, an X-ray of the breasts, can detect 90-95% of cancers unable to be felt during a self-exam. The actual test only takes about five to ten minutes. The National Cancer Institute recommends women 40+ get mammograms every one to two years.
- **Prostate exams** for men include a simple blood test (called a PSA test) and a digital rectal exam – or DRE. The good news is that the DRE only takes about 5 minutes. About half the time, any suspicious lump found during this exam is not cancer. The American Urological Society and the American Cancer Society recommend these tests annually for men age 50+.
- **Cervical cancer** screening is typically performed through a Pap test during a routine pelvic exam. The Pap looks for abnormal cells growing on the cervix that can be cancerous or precancerous. The exam takes less than five minutes. Early detection and treatment of abnormal cell changes is important in preventing cervical cancer.
- **Colorectal** exams are typically recommended for men and women beginning at age 50 according to the American Cancer Society. There are several methods doctors use to screen for colorectal cancer, beginning with a DRE. Based on your personal health history, your doctor will recommend the most appropriate test for you. Typically, these tests are only repeated every five to ten years.

Sources:

National Cancer Institute – www.nci.gov

American Cancer Society – www.cancer.org

This information is intended for educational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your physician for advice about changes that may affect your health.

