

Colon Cancer: Hope with Prevention, Early Treatment

If there is such a thing as a preventable cancer, colon cancer is it. “It’s a tragedy that in this age, anyone should die from colon cancer,” says Dr. C. Gregory Albers, gastroenterologist at with the H.H. Chao Comprehensive Digestive Disease Center at UCI Medical Center.

The reason? Ordinary lifestyle modifications, such as diet and exercise, and simple screening procedures reduce colon cancer rates up to 90 percent.

“That’s the good news—there is tremendous hope,” Albers says. “Here’s a more sobering fact: A lot of people don’t get the message.”

Diet and exercise alone may prevent cancer of the colon in 50 to 70 percent of people. A balanced diet should be low in fat, high in fiber and include calcium, vitamin D, selenium and folic acid. And any exercise is beneficial.

Everyone 50 and older (45 and older for African-Americans) should see a doctor for a colonoscopy, a 20-minute procedure that not only detects colon cancer, but also finds precancerous polyps. The polyps can be removed immediately, which has shown to prevent 76 percent to 90 percent of colon cancers.

Other screening methods that are possibly simpler—but less effective—include annual fecal occult blood testing alone or in combination with sigmoidoscopy, barium enema, virtual colonoscopy or fecal DNA testing.

“Anyone with symptoms, especially rectal bleeding, should be seen for a diagnostic colonoscopy,” Albers says. “Early treatment can be extremely effective. There is so much hope for these patients.”

To learn more about colorectal cancer, plan to attend Taking Charge of Your Health Care, UCI Medical Center’s annual senior health event. See registration materials in this newsletter for details.



Osteoporosis: No Cure, But Treatments Offer Relief

Treating osteoporosis is a challenge because there currently is no cure for the bone-thinning disease, only treatments for its complications. Surgical and nonsurgical procedures offer some relief.

Two surgical procedures help repair spinal bone fractures: vertebroplasty and kyphoplasty. In both, a doctor injects bone cement directly into the fracture site through a large needle-like tube called a cannula. This stabilizes the bone, relieves pain and helps the patient stand straighter.

“They are both minimally invasive procedures with very good results for pain relief,” says Dr. Laura Paré, neurological surgeon at UCI Medical Center.

The best nonsurgical therapies, according to UCI geriatrician Dr. Sonia Sehgal are:

- Exercise plus consumption of calcium and vitamin D, in addition to drug therapy.
- Biphosphonate drugs Fosamax and Actinel. They help strengthen the bones and prevent further bone loss, but must be taken with caution to prevent gastrointestinal complications.
- Forteo, an injected synthetic parathyroid hormone, which helps stimulate bone growth and increase density.
- Calcitonin, administered by nasal spray or injection, that helps prevent bone loss as well as alleviate discomfort from bone fractures.

Hormone replacement therapy, once commonly prescribed to treat osteoporosis, is now frowned upon because of excessive complications, Sehgal says.

“Weight-bearing exercise is one of the best ways to prevent bone loss,” Sehgal says. “It increases bone density, strength and balance, which reduces the risk of fall.”

Hear Dr. Sonia Sehgal discuss osteoporosis at UCI Medical Center’s annual senior health event, Taking Charge of Your Health Care, on May 16. To register, send in the card included in this newsletter.