

With our New Year's resolutions up and running, it's time to continue the theme of prevention. I am often asked in the clinic about common cancers and the screening programs that are available in Alberta. Cancer screening allows people who have no symptoms to get checked for various types of cancer in order to find changes early and treat them, if necessary. Common cancers that we screen for in Alberta are breast, cervical, and colorectal.

Early detection of breast, cervical and colorectal cancers increases the chances for successful treatment. Because screening tests check for abnormal cells that may lead to cancer, some cancers can even be prevented. Any abnormal cells can be watched closely and treated before they turn into cancer.



Breast Cancer Screening:

If you're a woman between 50 and 74, it's important to get mammograms regularly (every 2 years). A mammogram is an X-ray of your breasts. A clinical breast exam should be done routinely by a health care professional as well. Women 40 to 49 and women 75 years and older should talk to their healthcare provider about their need for screening mammograms. Men can also be screened for breast cancer.

Cervical Screening:

Women should have Pap tests done regularly. A Pap test is a quick procedure that collects a sample of cells and is then sent to the lab. Pap tests should begin at age 21 or 3 years after becoming sexually active, and continue through to age 69.

Colorectal Screening:

In general, both men and women should begin colorectal screening at age 50. If there is a strong family history, however, screening may be started earlier.

- **Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)** – This is a home stool test that is recommended for colorectal cancer screening for anyone who has no personal or family history with the disease. It's safe, easy to do and can be done right at home. It should be done every 1-2 years to make sure nothing new has developed.
- **Colonoscopy** – If your FIT shows any abnormal results, this follow-up test lets your doctor examine the lining of the rectum and colon for polyps. Polyps are small growths that may or may not be related to cancer, and they can be removed right away if they're found. A colonoscopy can also be recommended as your screening test instead of a FIT if you have any history that puts you at an increased risk.

Staying on top of cancer screening is only a part of prevention. Eating a healthy diet, 30 minutes of daily exercise, and maintaining a healthy weight are a few helpful others. Be aware of your family history. For more information on screening, please feel free to stop by my office.