

Colorectal Cancer Awareness and Screening

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Reed Walton] Of the cancers that affect both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in the nation. But it doesn't have to be. I'm Reed Walton, and I'm here with Dr. Lisa Richardson, Director of the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control at CDC. We're going to talk about screening for—and prevention of—colorectal cancer. Dr. Richardson, is it really possible to *prevent* colorectal cancer?

[Lisa Richardson] Yes, it is. With the right screening test done at the right time. Sixty to 70 percent of colorectal cancers can be prevented with screening. Almost 23 million people between the ages of 50 and 75 have not been screened for colorectal cancer. If we increase the number of people in that group who get screened to 80 or 90 percent, 20,000 fewer people per year will get colorectal cancer altogether.

[Reed Walton] Dr. Richardson, explain how screening helps prevent colorectal cancer.

[Lisa Richardson] The screening tests look for abnormal growths called polyps in the lower intestine. Polyps can turn into cancer if they are left untreated. However, if you remove the polyp, the cancer will never happen.

[Reed Walton] You said “tests.” Is there more than one way to get screened for this type of cancer?

[Lisa Richardson] Yes, most people don't know there are a number of tests available. The test people often think about is called a colonoscopy, which is done at a doctor's office. During a colonoscopy, a tube is put into the colon to check for polyps. But there are also tests, like stool tests, that people can do at home.

[Reed Walton] So why aren't people getting screened?

[Lisa Richardson] Well, there are several reasons. Often, people don't know that they need to be screened. Doctors aren't recommending the tests. So ask your doctor if you need to have the test done. And, people are just afraid of cancer.

[Reed Walton] You're an oncologist—a cancer doctor—so you've seen people that have been affected by colorectal cancer who maybe didn't have to be, if they had gotten screened.

[Lisa Richardson] Yes, and it's not just as a doctor, but as a family member. Colorectal cancer is a tragedy that can often be avoided. My aunt passed away from colorectal cancer that might have been prevented if she had been screened.

[Reed Walton] I take it that you have been screened yourself?

[Lisa Richardson] Of course! As soon as I turned 50 I got tested right away. I can tell you that getting it done was straightforward, and it was well worth the effort. The best test is the one that gets done.

[Reed Walton] Dr. Richardson, thank you for taking the time to come in and speak with me on this very important topic. For more information on colorectal cancer and colorectal cancer screening, visit cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.