

Alliance Ob/GYN Info Sheet on Colonoscopy

- 1) The most common cancer in the US in nonsmokers is colon cancer
- 2) Colon cancer starts in small colon polyps, and usually takes 10 years to progress from benign polyp to invasive cancer
- 3) Benign polyps are easily seen and removed at the time of colonoscopy, so they can never turn into cancer
- 4) 90% of colon cancer and nearly 100% of deaths from colon cancer could be prevented if everyone had a colonoscopy as recommended (start age 50, then every 10 years, for average risk patients)
- 5) Compared to colonoscopy, checking the stool for blood or having a sigmoidoscopy (scope of the lower 20" of the colon, done in the Primary Care doctor's office, no sedation), will only find 1/3 of the colon cancers in women
- 6) Colonoscopy is very safe – only 1/500 people will have a complication
- 7) The prep is not as bad as you think it is
- 8) You will be completely sedated for the procedure and will not feel anything uncomfortable, and probably won't remember anything
- 9) If the colonoscopy is normal you don't need another one for 10 years! If you have polyps, symptoms, or a family history of colon cancer, you may need one sooner.
- 10) Tips to make it easier
 - Try for an early morning appointment
 - Ask about prep options and pick the one that sounds best to you
 - Convince a friend or spouse to get one too and schedule them the same week – you can drive each other
 - Eat lightly for a few days before your prep
- 11) Excuses we don't buy:
 - I'll go next year (sure you will)
 - I'm too busy (to save your own life?)
 - No one in my family ever had colon cancer (like most people with colon cancer)
 - I don't have any bowel symptoms (ditto)
 - It's too dangerous (see above)
 - I don't want to do the prep, it's icky (colon cancer is kind of icky too)
 - It will hurt (we promise it will not)
 - I'll think about it (just do it!)