A Patient Story: The Visit That Can Save Your Life

A colonoscopy is a common procedure. It is used to look for the cause of problems or changes in your bowel. And it can find cancer at its earliest stages, when it's easier to treat.

Too Busy for a Colonoscopy?

Are you really so busy that you can't take a few hours to prepare for and have your colonoscopy? Then you are definitely too busy for colon cancer! I put my colonoscopy off for far too long. Now, I have had to make time for surgery and six months of chemotherapy. If you are 50 or over and have never had one, or there's a history of colon cancer or other colon problems in your family, I personally recommend you make time right now to make an appointment for your colonoscopy or other related exam.

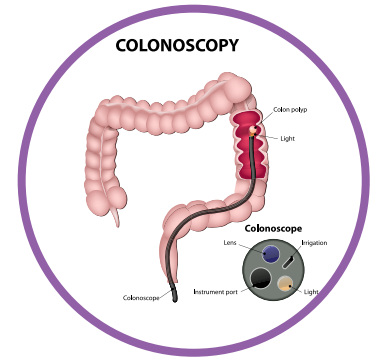### Why Did I Wait so Long to Make My Appointment?

Pick a reason or two! Too busy, too anxious, too afraid, didn't want to be bothered, procrastination runs rampant in my family? Ultimately, the biggest reason was that it-can't-happen-to-me mentality that afflicts so many men. It doesn't matter why I put it off. What does matter is that I didn't make the appointment until it was too late to avoid colon cancer.

> " I now refer to the folks in General Surgery as my Lifesavers "

Speak to your Nurse or Physician to Arrange for a Screening

Ultimately an Unexpected Phone Call Saved My Life!

I finally made an appointment for my first ever colonoscopy at age 64 when I was called by one of the Nurses at the Surgery Clinic. She was going down the list phoning everyone who needed a colonoscopy. When I said I probably needed one, she immediately offered me an appointment for a consultation. She made it so easy, that I accepted the appointment. I now refer to the folks in General Surgery as my Lifesavers as her call saved my life!

Preparation for Colonoscopy

Just so you know, the preparation for the colonoscopy and the test itself are nowhere near as bad as accounts from friends or the internet make it out to be! Drinking the laxative to clean you out before the test was more boring than terrible. Refrigerate the mixture and it goes down quite easily. And, on the day of the colonoscopy, once the anesthesia kicks in, you won't feel a thing.

Ironically, the first part of my colonoscopy was textbook routine — the doctor referred to it as "unremarkable." He removed the few polyps he found as they routinely do during this exam. Removing the polyps prevents them from turning into tumors in the future. The second part of my exam was much more "remarkable." The doctor found a fairly large tumor in the lower part of my colon. He took a biopsy and within the week, the lab confirmed my worst fears. The tumor was malignant — I had colon cancer.

The rest is history, as they say. First, surgery to remove the tumor — it's called a colectomy. My surgeon removed the affected part of the colon in an operation that took about four hours. Then, it was five uncomfortable days in the hospital. The hospital staff were great, but it's still no fun being hospitalized. I then spent almost four weeks convalescing at home. Almost one month to the day after my surgery, I returned to work. I quickly discovered that even working part-time quickly drained my energy levels to zero. It will be awhile until I can return to a full-time schedule. What's next? I'm focused entirely on the upcoming six months of chemotherapy. All my plans for work, travel, family, and friends are officially on hold.

The Moral

Make time for examinations that can identify problems before they become life threatening. Each and every day, I wish the polyp that probably caused my colon cancer had been removed during a routine colonoscopy when I was 50, 55, or 60. While my surgery was successful and saved my life, the resulting cancer is turning out to be considerably more time consuming than a routine colonoscopy. Taking a little time now for a colonoscopy could save your life!

> " Make time... to identify problems before they become life threatening. "