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*"Partnering to promote, protect and preserve health in our community."*

## **NEWS**

**Date:** February 25, 2014

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### **March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month: Screening Could Save Your Life**

When Sharie Peterson of Kuna was diagnosed ten years ago, doctors defined it as stage three colon cancer. "After I was diagnosed, I found that two brothers and two aunts had polyps removed before they became cancerous. No one ever said anything to me," said Peterson, now 71.

While it can begin silently without symptoms, colon cancer's impact is undeniable. Among cancers affecting both men and women in Idaho and throughout the United States, cancer of the colon and rectum is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths. However, colon cancer is preventable with early screening and detection.

Upon diagnosis, Peterson had a large section of her colon removed followed by rounds of chemotherapy and radiation – today, she is an eight year survivor who urges people to learn their family history and get screened. "Don't let the prep for a colonoscopy be an excuse, because it's nothing. They have made it so much easier than years ago," offered Peterson.

Screening can find precancerous polyps – abnormal growths in the colon or rectum – so that they can be removed before turning into cancer. Screening also helps find colorectal cancer at an early stage, when treatment often leads to a cure.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if everyone aged 50 years old and older were to be screened regularly; nearly 60% of deaths from colorectal cancer could be avoided.

The most basic screening available is the Fecal Occult Blood Test. You can get this **free colon disease screening kit** and colon cancer information by calling the Idaho CareLine at 2-1-1. In the comfort of your own home, the test detects hidden blood in the stool, a warning sign of cancer. The free screening kit also provides information on the steps you may need to take in preventing and screening for the cancer.

While screening is generally recommended to begin at age 50, based on your age and family history of colorectal cancer, your health care provider will be able to suggest when you should begin screening and the type of screening test that is most appropriate for you. Anyone with a family history of colorectal cancer should talk to their health care provider before age 50.

To **reduce your risk** of colon cancer the American Cancer Society suggests:

- Increase the intensity and amount of physical activity
- Limit intake of red and processed meats
- Get the recommended levels of calcium and vitamin D
- Eat more vegetables and fruits and maintain a healthy diet
- Avoid obesity and weight gain around the midsection
- Avoid excess alcohol

While a colon cancer diagnosis forced Sharie Peterson through a rough period in life, she has come through it as a changed woman in both spirit and health habits, “I think I live more appreciatively and try to do more things for other people than before. I look better, eat better, and walk every day,” said Peterson, who also takes Fit and Fall Proof™ classes through the Central District Health Department, enjoys line dancing classes and works two days a week.

If you have questions regarding colon cancer prevention or screening, contact your healthcare provider or the Idaho CareLine at 2-1-1.

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