



PERSONAL STORIES

The Best Gift at Fifty – A Colonoscopy!

When Michelle Lancaster turned 50, she received flowers, cards and a gooey chocolate birthday cake. Then she gave herself a gift no-one else had – a colonoscopy. Talk of those "50's" tests like the colonoscopy, often came up when Michelle chatted with her sisters and her girlfriends, all approaching 50 as well. So, shortly after her birthday, Michelle asked her family doctor about being screened for colon cancer. Michelle's doctor advised the FOBT (fecal occult blood test – a test for hidden blood in the stool – and handed her a kit to perform the test at home.

"The FOBT kit sat in my kitchen in-box for quite a while," Michelle admits. "I kept looking at it and thinking that I really should get around to doing that test." Then Michelle's sister, Sue, an endoscopic nurse, received a positive result for cancer cells during her own colonoscopy test.

"She was shocked," Michelle says. Sue's colonoscopy revealed several polyps – growths on the lining of the intestine – and lurking inside the polyps, cancer." Although Sue's cancer were caught early and removed completely, my sister became quite forceful in her message to me – 'Get a colonoscopy. It's the gold standard for colon cancer screening.'"

Michelle went back to her family doctor with the news about her sister's cancer and she was immediately referred for a colonoscopy – an examination of the large intestine (colon or large bowel) that is performed by a trained doctor.

A bowel preparation or 'prep' the day before the test cleans the bowel so that the bowel wall can be seen clearly during

the test. "I spent the afternoon before my colonoscopy at home drinking the bowel prep – four litres of sickingly sweet fluid," Michelle recalls. "It was a bit arduous, but I used tricks like eating a soft diet for a few days before and chewing jello to chase down the terrible taste of the liquid."

The next morning Michelle registered at the GI clinic, changed into a hospital gown and was wheeled into the procedure suite. The staff gave Michelle an intravenous sedative to make her sleepy and relaxed. "I wasn't at all nervous," Michelle says. "The test was totally painless and I didn't feel embarrassed, prodded or exposed in any way."

The colonoscopy lasted 20 minutes and Michelle even watched part of the procedure on the TV monitor. "A half an hour later, I bought a sesame bagel and a large coffee and walked out of the hospital. It's not a big deal at all."

Polyps removed during Michelle's colonoscopy were sent to a laboratory for evaluation. Two weeks later, Michelle's family doctor gave her the best birthday present of all – an "all clear" for colon cancer.

"Knowing that the polyps are gone and that I'm fine gives me a lot of confidence," says Michelle. "Now when we have those '50's' chats, I tell my friends, if possible, to have a colonoscopy. It's the best test to have – it's absolutely definitive – and I would do it again, without question."

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You are not alone

About 22,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with colon cancer and close to 9,000 die in this year. Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in our country.

What you should know

Colon cancer is more than 95 per cent preventable if detected early. However, today, fewer than 20 per cent of eligible Canadians making use of it. Everyone 50 or over should get screened, even in the absence of any symptoms.

For people without a family history of colon cancer, screening can be performed in several ways including a test for hidden blood in the stool (FOBT), or colonoscopy. Patients with a positive FOBT require colonoscopy to detect, biopsy or remove any potential polyps or cancers.

Signs and symptoms

Colon cancer in its earliest stages produces little or no symptoms. Symptoms don't usually become apparent until the disease has reached a more advanced stage after a collection of abnormal cells, called a polyp, has transformed into cancer.

Ask yourself:

- Am I over 50 years of age?
- Do I have a family history of colon cancer?
- Have I had prior diagnosis of polyps or early-stage colon cancer?
- Do I have inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease)?
- Have I had unexplained rectal bleeding?

If you answered yes to any of the above, you could be at risk of developing colon cancer and should speak to your doctor about getting screened.

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- Please send me information about protecting and improving my digestive health.

Over 20 million Canadians suffer from digestive disorders every year. The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation believes this is unnecessary and unacceptable.

We reduce suffering and improve quality of life by empowering Canadians with trusted, up to date, science-based information about digestive health and disease.

As the Foundation of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, we work directly with leading physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals to help you understand and take control of your digestive health with confidence and optimism.

Through research and public education, we aim to:

 <p>REDUCE the incidence and prevalence of digestive disorders</p>	 <p>IMPROVE understanding of digestive health issues</p>
 <p>SUPPORT those suffering from digestive disorders</p>	 <p>ENHANCE quality of life for those living with digestive disorders</p>

Request for support

The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation is a national charity governed by a volunteer board of directors. We rely on donations from the public and the generosity of our partners to develop and deliver our programs. Please consider including our Foundation as one of your chosen charities.

Contact us/Donate to

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