

Script – Print – A rise in cancer in people under 50

There's a misperception that cancer mostly impacts older people. Not so. Cancer is on the rise in people 50 and under.

There are many reasons for the spike, especially lifestyle factors starting early in life and adulthood which are likely to increase the risk of cancer. Factors include poor diets, sedentary lifestyles, and obesity.

The rise isn't limited to just one type of cancer. Since 1990, there has been a significant increase in cancers of the breast, colon, esophagus, kidney, liver, and pancreas around the world.

For example, according to the American Cancer Society, the rate of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer in the U.S. is dropping in those 65 and older but increasing in younger people.

Deborah Oyelowo is a family nurse practitioner who specializes in hematology/oncology for OSF HealthCare. She points to the lack of screening, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when some patients were reluctant to schedule appointments.

"This is a downside of what happened with COVID," says Oyelowo. "A lot of patients did not get the time and the appointments to have an actual one-on-one with their providers for screenings. Younger people do not know exactly what to look for. By the time the symptoms show up, it's reached a progressive stage. And they don't believe that cancer can exist in the younger population, but unfortunately it does."

Screening also means making sure self-exam is part of a regular routine, whether you're female or male. Paying attention to warning signs can go a long way to staying on top of potential issues.

"And when I say screening, I also mean self-exams," says Oyelowo. "All patients need to know the proper way of doing a self-exam, especially the female population. When something is not right don't wait till things are really bad before you reach out to your provider."

Oyelowo says prevention is the best medicine. She encourages people of any age to make lifestyle changes including a diet that includes more fruits and vegetables and less saturated fat, red meat, processed foods, and sugar, exercising regularly, and avoiding alcohol and tobacco.

She adds that it's paramount to know your family history and to establish with a provider if you don't already have one.

Oyelowo would like to see more community outreach programs in churches and schools geared towards teaching young people the importance of being invested in their health.

"Everyone needs to be an advocate for themselves," she adds. "I realize doctors are responsible for knowing things, but they can only know things you tell them. They cannot see through you. You need to come, talk, communicate and have an established relationship with your providers."

For more information about cancer care, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).