

Script – Broadcasting – A punch in the gut

INTRO

It was a little more than a year ago when country music star Toby Keith shocked fans with the news that he had been diagnosed with stomach cancer in the fall of 2021.

But now the 62-year-old Keith says he's feeling better. He's continuing chemo, but his tumor has shrunk and his blood work has improved. So much that the singer is hoping to return to the road this fall if he continues to feel good.

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Stomach cancer, also known as gastric cancer, is the growth of cancer cells in the lining and wall of the stomach. While breast, colon and prostate cancers tend to get more media attention, stomach cancer is nothing to ignore.

Stomach cancer symptoms aren't always easily identified, according to Katie Nagel, an oncology nurse navigator with OSF HealthCare. Feeling bloated after eating, heartburn, upper abdominal pain and unintentional weight loss are just some signs of a potential problem.

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Katie Nagel, oncology nurse navigator, OSF HealthCare

"Unfortunately, with stomach cancer, you don't see symptoms when it's early," says Katie Nagel, an oncology nurse navigator for OSF HealthCare. "But as it starts to progress, you might see some symptoms that include nausea, vomiting, you feel full quicker than you usually do, fatigue. You might notice blood in your stool. It's important to know that most of the time those don't mean cancer, but it's important to let your doctor know if those persist." (:24)

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There are about 26,000 cases that occur in the United States a year including 11,000 deaths. Stomach cancer accounts for about 1.5% of all cancers.

Risk factors for stomach cancer include:

- Age - most people are diagnosed with stomach cancer in their late 60s or older
- Sex – stomach cancer is more common in men than women
- Obesity – being overweight may increase the risk of stomach cancer
- Race – stomach cancer is more common in Hispanics, African Americans and Asians

While there isn't screening for stomach cancer like there is for colon and breast cancer, Nagel says there are things you can do, including diet modification, exercise and avoiding a sedentary lifestyle.

The good news is incidence rates of stomach cancer have dropped about 1.5% every year in the last decade in the U.S. Advances in the treatment of stomach cancer, which include chemotherapy, immunotherapy and surgery, have made an impact as well. And Nagel adds that celebrities like Toby Keith sharing their story can only help when it comes to awareness of this disease.