

In The Spirit of Health

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
MD Anderson
Cancer Center
Making Cancer History®

"I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you." - 3 John 1:2

Losing a cousin to colorectal cancer saved his life

As a health care quality professional, Al Thomas always made his annual physical a priority. When he went to see his doctor in January 2020 at age 38, he asked about his risk for colorectal cancer.

Al's cousin and lifelong best friend had just been diagnosed with advanced colorectal cancer. He died a few months later, leaving behind a wife and two children. He was only three months older than Al.

"Before my cousin was diagnosed, I wasn't really educated on colorectal cancer," Al says. "We thought he just had gas, or maybe an ulcer, and the doctors told him the same thing."

Colorectal cancer rates are on the rise among adults under age 50, especially those ages 18 to 35. Black men and women also are more likely to die from the disease than patients of any other race.

"Watching what he went through was difficult, but his sacrifice wasn't in vain – it saved my life," says Al. When Al got a positive result on a stool-based screening test, he took it seriously. He's now recovered from stage I colorectal cancer and is eager to raise awareness.

"I know the colorectal cancer mortality rate is significant when it comes to Black and brown folks, so I want to help educate as many people as I can," he says. "If you have symptoms, get them checked out, and be persistent with your doctor. After seeing what my family went through with my cousin, I know how things could have gone for me. He saved my life, and now, hopefully, other people's lives too."



Al Thomas with his wife, Demetria, and their kids

"If you have symptoms, get them checked out, and be persistent with your doctor."

- Al Thomas, *Survivor*

Beginning at age 45, most men and women should get a colonoscopy every 10 years to screen for colorectal cancer.

Alternatives to colonoscopy include:

- Virtual colonoscopy every five years
- Stool-based tests every year or every three years, depending on the test

Individuals of any age should see their doctor if they have any of the following symptoms:

- Rectal bleeding or blood in the stool or toilet after bowel movement
- Prolonged diarrhea or constipation
- Change in the size or shape of your stool
- Abdominal pain or cramping in your lower stomach
- Urge to have a bowel movement when there is no need

If you have questions about In the Spirit of Health, e-mail Community@MDAnderson.org or call 713-792-3363.

Tips to reduce your colorectal cancer risk

Get screened.

Screening exams for colorectal cancer can find the disease early, when it's most treatable.

Maintain a healthy weight.

Excess body fat is linked to an increased risk of colorectal cancer.

Know your family medical history.

Tell your doctor if someone in your family has had cancer. Knowing your family history can make a difference in preventing cancer.

Exercise regularly.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise each week.

Eat a plant-based diet.

Make 2/3 of your plate vegetables, whole grains and fruit. The other 1/3 should be lean animal protein or plant-based protein.

Limit red meat.

The more you eat, the more you increase your risk.

Avoid processed meat.

This includes bacon, deli meats and hot dogs.

Limit alcohol.

For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol.

If you smoke or use any kind of tobacco, **get help** to stop right away.

Faith without works is dead - James 2:14

Adding high fiber foods to your diet can help reduce your risk for colorectal and other cancer.



Lentil and veggie enchilada casserole

Try this healthy recipe to add more fiber to your diet. Lentil and veggie enchilada casserole— a comfort meal that's healthy.



► Open your camera or QR code reader to scan the QR code to view the recipe

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