

Preventing Cancer for CDC – and for Me

As a mom, a wife, a doctor, and the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, I'm pretty busy. So it's tempting to put my health on the back burner – even though, as an oncologist, I know better. As the person looking out for both my family's and my country's health, I realize I have to practice what I preach – and that's cancer prevention.

My 50th birthday was a great reminder that I needed some cancer screening tests. Everyone age 50 and older needs to get regularly screened for colorectal (colon) cancer. Almost all colorectal cancers start as polyps, or abnormal growths in the colon or rectum. Screening can help find these polyps so they can be removed before turning into cancer. That's right – screening can actually prevent cancer before it starts.

I also scheduled my mammogram. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women, after skin cancer. The risk of developing breast cancer grows as women get older. Current recommendations are for women ages 50 to 74 to get a mammogram (an x-ray picture of the breasts) every two years. Whether to screen for breast cancer before the age of 50 is a decision that women should make with their doctor.

There are several screening tests that we all need reminders of. For instance, I asked my doctor when my last Pap test was. Pap tests are recommended every three years for women ages 21-65, but there are other screening options for cervical cancer, too. Here's another example



where screening and early detection can actually *prevent cancer*.

While not all cancers can be prevented, we can all take steps to lower our overall cancer risk. I urge you, if you smoke, to quit now. CDC offers free resources to help. Lung cancer – just one of the many risks from smoking – is the leading cancer killer in women. If you are over 55 and a current smoker, or someone who has quit within the past 15 years, ask your doctor about lung cancer screening.

I'm also careful to protect my skin when I go outside. I remind my son that it's easy to use sunscreen, wear protective clothes, or hang out in the shade when you can. Nearly 5 million people are treated for skin cancer every year in the U.S. Skin cancer can be serious, expensive, and sometimes even deadly. Fortunately, most skin cancers can be prevented.

Just as I urge my friends, family, and neighbors to take action against cancer, I challenge you to do the same!

Learn more about cancer screening and prevention at: www.cdc.gov/cancer.

###