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Early Detection Saves Lives: Two Stories, One Powerful Message

Lisa, 58, and Tom, 57 (names have been changed to protect privacy), had very different paths, but both learned a powerful lesson about the importance of colon cancer screenings. Their stories are reminders that no matter where you are in life, taking the time for a simple test could save your future.

Lisa was always proactive about her health. She ate well, exercised regularly, and kept up with her routine check-ups. When her doctor recommended a colonoscopy, she hesitated for a moment but knew it was important. At 58, she was due for the test. What she didn't expect was the result: colon cancer. Thankfully, it was caught early—stage one—and with minimal treatment, she was able to recover quickly. Six years later, Lisa is healthy, cancer-free, and feels like she was given a second chance at life.

Tom's story was much different. For over nine months, he had been experiencing troubling symptoms—tarry black stools, diarrhea, and weight loss. But Tom, like many, kept putting it off. He never had a colon cancer screening, and he thought the symptoms would eventually pass. It wasn't until his daughter, Sarah, confronted him and urged him to see a doctor that he finally went for testing. The diagnosis? Stage 4 colon cancer. His treatment journey included surgery to have a colostomy and radiation therapy. It was a difficult, emotional time, but after three years of treatment, Tom was finally cancer-free. Though his journey was long, Tom is grateful to be alive and now encourages others to take action earlier than he did.

Both Lisa and Tom faced the same challenge, but their outcomes were drastically different. Lisa's early screening led to early detection, a quicker recovery, and years of health. Tom, on the other hand, learned the hard way that waiting can make a big difference in survival.

So, what can you do? If you're over 45, don't wait for symptoms to appear. Whether you're feeling fine or noticing troubling signs, a simple colon cancer screening could change your life. Like Lisa and Tom, you deserve the best chance at living a long, healthy life. Get screened today—because early detection saves lives.

Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) has joined the annual statewide effort organized by the Nebraska Cancer Coalition to heighten awareness of lifesaving colorectal cancer screening during Colorectal Cancer Awareness month.

Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer in Nebraska. Incidences of colorectal cancer diagnosis and death remain higher in Nebraska compared to overall U.S. rates. Rates of colorectal cancer have increased in recent decades among individuals younger than 50. So much so that the official recommended age for colorectal cancer screening is now 45.

"Colorectal cancer screening is critical, as symptoms often only become prevalent in later stages of the disease when it's much more difficult to fight back. It's important for Nebraskans ages 45 and older speak with their health care provider about screening as soon as possible, especially those who have postponed getting screened," said Panhandle Colon Cancer Prevention Program Coordinator Cheri Farris. "Colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable, but you don't know if you don't go."



“Speaking with your primary care provider about cancer screening is something we encourage all Panhandle adults to do. Take ownership of your health and don’t be afraid to advocate for yourself,” stated Cheri Farris. “Physicians and healthcare providers appreciate patients who do.”

There are multiple safe, affordable options available for screening, including at-home test kits. Individuals are encouraged to contact their primary care provider to start a conversation about screening. Or, if you are 45 -74 years old, contact Cheri Farris at 308.220.8020 or cfarris@pphd.ne.gov to find out how to receive your free at home test kit today. Additionally, you can register for the test kit online at <https://tinyurl.com/52n37f23> Fight colon cancer today by learning what your poo is telling you!

Join PPHD in raising awareness about colon cancers and honor all affected by it on Friday, March 7. Wear blue and send your photos to cfarris@pphd.ne.gov or post them on the PPHD Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/panhandlepublichealth>

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community. Visit our website www.pphd.ne.gov.