Spotting Cancer

Yes, African Americans are at higher risk. But one key to treating (and beating) cancer is early diagnosis. Here's the lowdown on when and how often you should screen for some commonly diagnosed cancers

July 1, 2005 By Jim Cho

>> Breast Cancer: Experts recommend that women start screening in their thirties or even—if there's a family history—in their twenties. Younger women can perform the breast self-exam at home (call 800-462-9273 or visit www.komen.org to find out how); they should also have mammograms and clinical breast exams performed every three years. Women over 40 should schedule these tests annually. For more info, call Sisters Network Inc. at 866-781-1808.

>> Prostate Cancer: Because of higher risk, African-American men should start screening at 40. Ask your doctor for a digital rectal exam or a prostate-specific antigen test, which looks for abnormal levels of a protein produced by the prostate. Call the National Prostate Cancer Coalition at 888-245-9455.

>> Colorectal Cancer: If you have a family history of colon or rectal cancer, ask annually for a fecal occult blood test, which examines stool for traces of blood. For those over 50, the American Cancer Society recommends a flexible sigmoidoscopy or a double-contrast barium enema every five years or a colonoscopy every 10. Contact the Colon Cancer Alliance at 877-422-2030.

>> Lung Cancer: If you're exposed to smoke or toxic materials or have a family history, ask your doctor for a chest X-ray or a CAT scan (a three-dimensional X-ray). Call the Alliance for Lung Cancer Advocacy Support and Education at 800-298-2436.

For general information on cancer, call the American Cancer Society at 800-227-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

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