

Cancer screening — early detection saves lives

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Singapore. Certain cancers are preventable and many are curable, especially in the early stages.

Screening is effective in the prevention and early detection of cancers such as colorectal cancer, liver cancer, breast cancer and cervical cancer, especially in certain risk groups. (Figure)

Colorectal cancer

Almost always developing from precancerous polyps, colorectal cancer can be prevented through regular screening, beginning at age 50 (or earlier in those with a family history of colorectal cancer). Yearly faecal occult blood test (FOBT) which detects the presence of blood in the stool is a common screening method. Those with a positive FOBT will have to undergo a colonoscopy to rule out colorectal cancer.

Colonoscopy, which examines the inner lining of the colon and rectum, is a more robust screening method as it allows detection and removal of polyps before they turn into cancer. If a cancer has already developed, it is also more likely to be discovered at an earlier stage on a screening

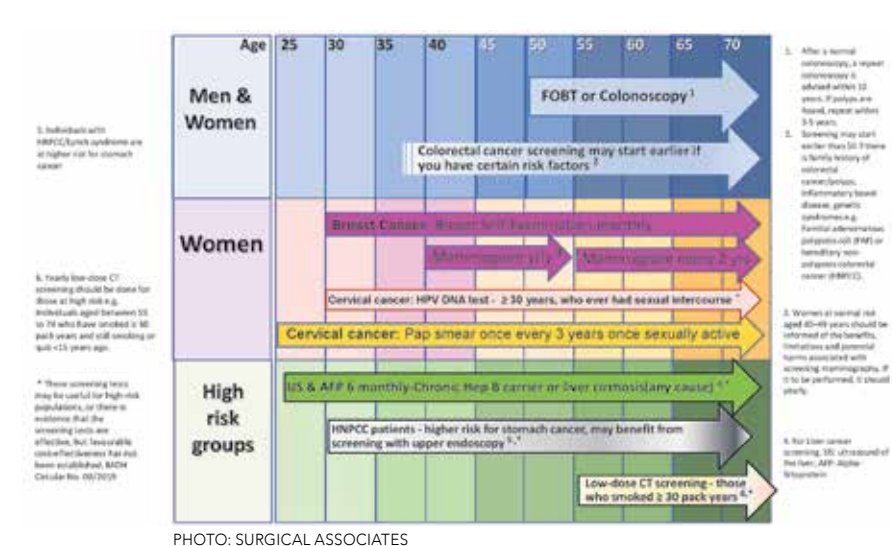


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colonoscopy, when treatment has a higher chance of cure.

Breast cancer

All normal risk, asymptomatic women (50 – 69 years old) should be screened with mammography every two years. Women at normal risk aged 40 – 49 years can consider

screening mammography yearly.

Cervical cancer

All women who have ever engaged in sexual activity should undergo screening for cervical cancer from the age of 25 with a Papanicolaou (Pap) smear, at least once every three years.

Liver cancer

Liver cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in males in Singapore and is challenging because most have no symptoms when the disease is in its early stages. Early detection can result in the cancer being more amenable to treatment and potentially translate to better outcomes. Therefore, it is important to have regular screening if you have any of the risk factors – Hepatitis B carrier or liver cirrhosis of any cause.

Screening includes an Ultrasound scan and a Tumour marker (Alpha-fetoprotein, AFP) every 6-monthly. Hepatitis B and C screening is also beneficial if one's medical condition is unknown, especially in certain groups (pregnancy, healthcare workers). Individuals with Hereditary Non-Polyposis Colon Cancer (HNPCC), who are at higher risk for gastric cancer, may benefit from screening with upper endoscopy (OGD), starting from age 30. (Figure)