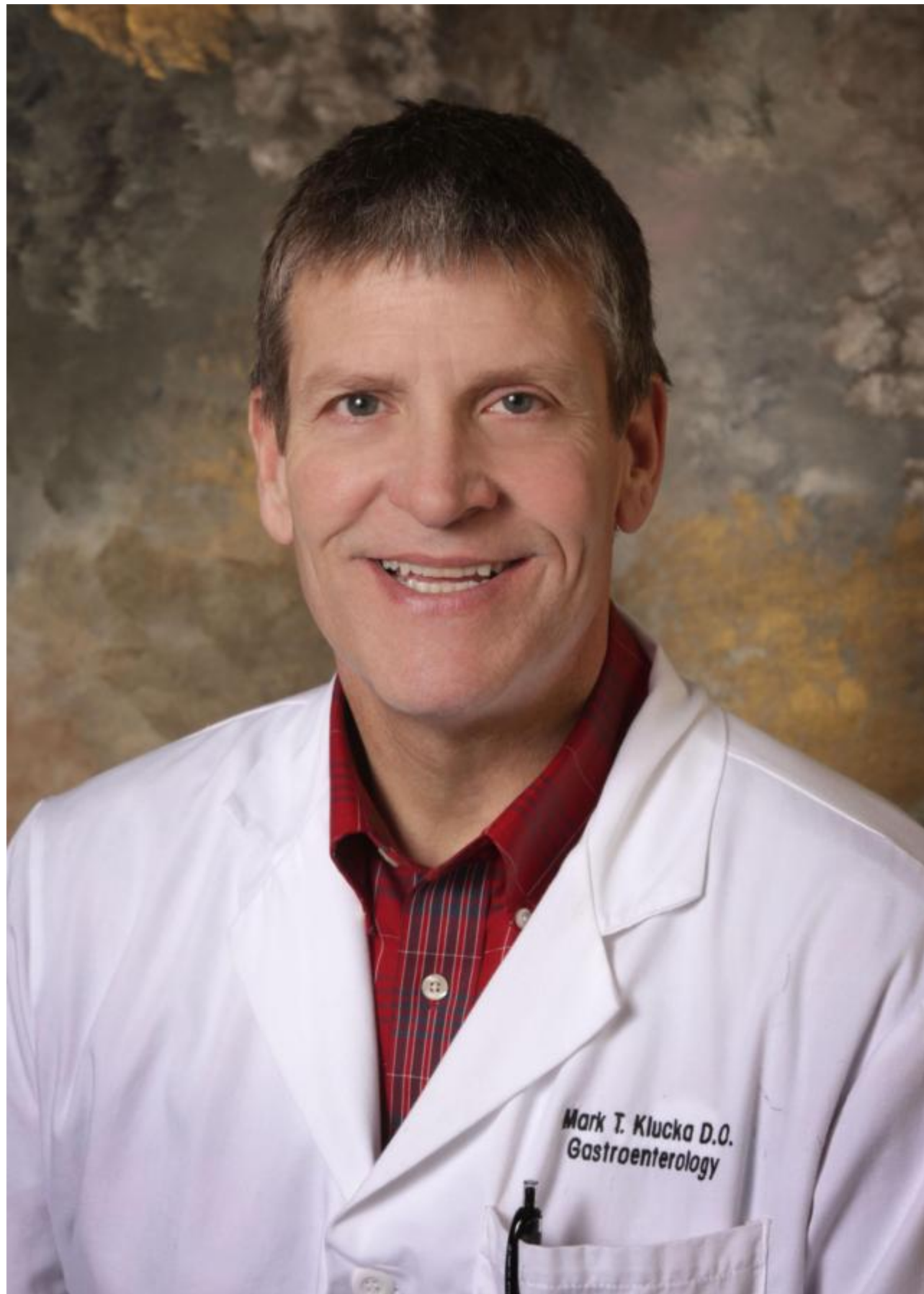




Spotlight on Colonoscopies

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ALTON – With National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month now over, a local gastroenterologist, Mark Klucka, D.O., with Saint Anthony's Physician Group, would like to give one last reminder about the importance of colon cancer screenings.

“Colon cancer screenings save lives. If you are 50 years old, start getting screened,” says Dr. Klucka. “If you're in a higher risk group, you may need to start regular screening at an earlier age and be screened more often.”

“Screenings are so important because early stages of colorectal cancer might not have any symptoms. The symptoms tend to come after the cancer has progressed and spread into the intestinal lining.”

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), for average-risks individuals with no symptoms, screening should begin at age 50. If you are at increased risk or are experiencing symptoms, speak to your physician right away. Most at risk are persons who have already had precancerous polyps removed or who have close relatives diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

A majority of colorectal cancers begin as a pre-cancerous polyp, a small growth in the wall of the colon. According to Dr. Klucka, a colonoscopy is not just used for cancer detection.

“A colonoscopy offers us the opportunity to not only look for cancerous growths, we can also remove any polyps before they become an issue,” Dr. Klucka said. “The nature of these polyps is why there is seldom any early warning. Typically, before you see any bleeding or feel any discomfort, the size of the polyp needs to increase.”

Possible signs and symptoms the ACS warns against include:

- Bleeding from the rectum
- Blood in the stool or in the toilet after having a bowel movement
- Dark- or black-colored stools
- A change in the shape of the stool
- Cramping pain in the lower stomach
- A feeling of discomfort or an urge to have a bowel movement when there is no need to have one
- New onset of constipation or diarrhea that lasts for more than a few days
- Unintentional weight loss

According to a recent study published in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, raising the current screening level from 58 percent people screened to 80 percent by 2018 could prevent 200,000 colon cancer deaths over the next 2 decades.

The study used a computer model to compare current screening rates with the 80 percent objective. The research showed that colon cancer incidence rates would drop by 22% and death rates would drop by 33% by the year 2030.

Statistics show that colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer related death when men and women are combined. Despite these numbers, there is still a tendency to ignore this largely preventable killer.

“Avoiding a screening because you don’t want to go through a colonoscopy is not acceptable,” says Dr. Klucka. “There are other tests you can use to check for blood in the stool, but a colonoscopy is still the best method for finding and removing the pre-cancerous polyps. Whatever test you choose -- follow through.”

For more information about colorectal cancer or to make appointment for a colonoscopy, please call: 465-2761.