

## **GUMC HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE - MARCH 2025**

### **March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and National Nutrition Month**

**Colorectal Cancer** often begins as a growth called a polyp inside the colon or rectum. Finding and removing polyps can prevent colorectal cancer. Cancer that begins in the colon is called colon cancer, and cancer that begins in the rectum is called rectal cancer. Cancer that affects either of these organs may also be called colorectal cancer. Both of these organs are in the lower portion of your digestive system. The rectum is at the end of the colon. The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that about 1 in 23 men and 1 in 25 women will develop colorectal cancer during their lifetime. Colon cancer ranks third in cancer deaths and is 90% preventable.

Julius Wilder, MD. PhD., Gastroenterologist and Transplant Hepatologist at Duke Cancer Institute states, “In our community, minorities and the medically under-served have the lowest colon cancer screening rates. Colon Cancer symptoms include blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss, and/or abdominal pain. \*Colonoscopies, the screening for colon cancer, involves the use of a long tube with a small camera attached, decreases mortality from the disease by 50%. A colonoscopy is recommended every 10 years. Screening allows for removal of polyps and early detection of cancer, thus improving both incidence and mortality rates.” Ways to decrease risk of colon cancer are to exercise regularly; control your weight; eat healthy and add fiber; don’t smoke; drink alcohol in moderation; get recommended screenings; get regular check-ups; and, protect your skin from direct sun rays.

Between 2011 and 2019, the number of new colorectal cancer cases in the United States decreased slightly per year in people aged 50 years and older, but increased slightly per year in people younger than 50 years. For the past 20 years, the rate of deaths from colorectal cancer has been decreasing in both men and women. The number of new cases and the number of deaths is higher in Black people compared with other races; however, studies have found no evidence that Black people have higher rates of precancerous lesions.

**National Nutrition Month**® National Nutrition Month® is an annual campaign established in 1973 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. During the month of March, everyone is invited to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits. Food connects us to our cultures, our families and our friends. Sharing a meal is an opportunity to learn about its preparation, who made it, and where the ingredients were sourced. Health, memories, traditions, seasons and access can all impact our relationship with food. While these factors influence the foods we eat, the foods we eat also affect our health. We celebrate National Nutrition Month® by promoting the importance of making informed food choices while developing both healthier eating and physical activity. Food is like a language that we all can understand. Food is much more than just a source of nourishment for survival, it connects all of us regardless of background, culture, or language. Food helps us feel

connected whether it's from a memory of a family/friend gathering, or experiencing a new cuisine.

Here are some ways to celebrate how "Food Connects Us" socially: 1) Host a potluck with family or friends; 2) Volunteer to help with community dinners at local food banks or soup kitchens; 3) Start new food traditions with family or friends; and, 4) Connect with local food providers from grocery stores, community agencies, or farmers to get involved. (SIDEBAR: Be sure to visit our newest local farmer's market "Off The Land" is located on 15-501 North. The owner Davone Goodwin would love for you to stop by.) Food also connects us economically by creating jobs in agriculture and food distribution. Food connections can make us think about how the workers in food production, food processing, and distribution, all collaborate in providing nourishment to each one of us on a daily basis.

Here are some ways to support the local food system: Try to buy from local farmers and look for locally produced foods. Volunteer at a community garden to connect with others while learning about sustainable practices. Consider starting a garden, or connecting with individuals and groups learning more about composting, growing plants, and other garden-related activities. Scotland County's local Cooperative Extension Office has a wealth of helpful information to help if you're interested. When possible, choose in season fresh fruits and vegetables. Don't forget frozen produce is a good option too.

As a family, commit to trying a new fruit or vegetable each week during National Nutrition Month®. Give family members a role in meal planning and let them pick out different recipes to try. Plan to eat more meals together as a family. Explore food recovery options in your community. If you watch TV, take breaks during commercials to be physically active. Practice mindful eating by limiting screen time at mealtime, including phones, computers, TV and other devices. Try more meatless meals, choices like beans and lentils are versatile plant-based protein sources that work in a variety of dishes. Let everyone help with food preparation, a skill for people of all ages. If you have kids, there are age-appropriate tasks they may enjoy learning how to do. Bring out the flavors of food by trying new herbs, spices or citrus fruit such as lemon or lime.

### **Remember Your ABC's:**

- **A**dvocate for yourself or the needs of your loved one.
- **B**e comfortable talking with your healthcare professional about issues.
- **C**ommunicate concerns with your family, friends, and doctor. **C**all on others to join you in exercising, and don't be discouraged – getting started is the hardest part!

(Excerpts were taken from the American Cancer Society (ACS) and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics) **Disclaimer:** The information contained in this document is not meant to diagnose or treat any illness. See your physician if you have questions or concerns.