



Stacey and Cassandra Friel with Cole

Most People Don't Consider a Colonoscopy to Be a Birthday Gift

This Young Mother Isn't Like Most Women



Stacey Friel spent her 36th birthday in surgery at Abington Memorial Hospital's Shorday Center for Advanced Gastrointestinal Surgery. The surgery removed a portion of her colon containing the cancerous tissue doctors had discovered during a colonoscopy. "I was lucky," said Stacey. "Doctors diagnosed my colon cancer in the earliest stages, when it's most curable." Stacey also deserves recognition for the early detection of her disease. She sought medical care when she first became aware of symptoms.

Stacey, a Maple Glen resident, was young to be diagnosed with colon cancer. (Many people are older than 50 when diagnosed and the average age of diagnosis is 73.) She had no risk factors for the disease and no family history. When she noticed intermittent changes in her bowel habits, Stacey contacted her physician. He ordered a colonoscopy, which led to the diagnosis and surgical cure of Stacey's cancer.

Mindfulness, vigilance and screening colonoscopy at age 50 are key when it comes preventing colon cancer, advises Steven A. Fassler, MD, chief, Colorectal Surgery at AMH. Colonoscopy is a screening method that examines the entire colon for precancerous or cancerous growths. In its early stages,

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colorectal cancer rarely has symptoms, so screening is a significant tool. "In medicine today, screening colonoscopy is the only test we have that actually prevents cancer," said Dr. Fassler. When diagnosed early, 90 percent of colorectal cancers are completely curable. Stacey's cancer was in that 90th percentile. Her final pathology results show no residual cancer.

Because Stacey's disease was diagnosed in its earliest stages, surgery was the only treatment necessary. Dr. Fassler performed a minimally invasive procedure to remove the diseased portion of Stacey's colon, then stapled the healthy colon back together. Today's advanced laparoscopic procedures result in less postoperative pain and a faster recovery. "A diagnosis of cancer stops your life in its tracks," said Dr. Fassler. "Minimally invasive surgery helps patients to return to their regular routines or move on with appropriate treatment for their cancer quickly."

The American Cancer Society recommends screening colonoscopy beginning at age 50 for men and women at average risk for developing colon cancer. "Recent studies, however, show that the greatest rise in incidence is among those between the ages of 40 and 49," warned Dr. Fassler. He also advised that those at higher risk for colon cancer should talk with their physicians who can recommend appropriate screening and follow up. Stacey, who is now considered high risk, will follow up regularly with her doctor and have routine colonoscopies throughout her life.

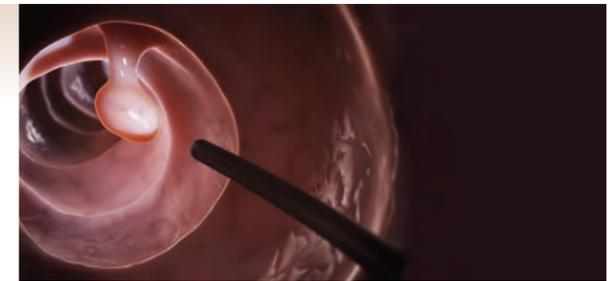


For Stacey, who is an avid country music fan, one of the unexpected outcomes of being a survivor of colon cancer was a personal meet and greet with some of the nation's top country music artists. Stacey had won an online essay contest she entered in 2014, about her cancer journey. The prize included VIP passes to Philadelphia country music station WXTU's 30th Anniversary Celebration last May, in Camden, NJ. At the concert, Stacey was recognized with a commemorative guitar signed by participating musicians, including her current favorite, Chase Rice.

It's been more than two years since Stacey's diagnosis. "When I first heard the word cancer, all I could think about was living long enough to see my daughter, who was only four at the time, graduate from high school," said Stacey. "Dr. Fassler did a great job educating and reassuring me and helping me to keep things in perspective." Stacey and husband Terry are preparing for the birth of their second child in April. "After the baby is born, I'll be able to get back on schedule with my annual colonoscopy," said Stacey. "That's how I plan to celebrate each of my birthdays from now on."

For more information about cancer care, and the advanced surgical options available at the Shorday Center for Advanced Gastrointestinal Surgery, call 215-481-2247 or visit www.abingtonhealth.org/cags.

For information about scheduling a colonoscopy at Abington Health, contact our Physician Referral Service, 215-481-MEDI (6334).



Screenings help save lives

Colon cancer is the third most common cancer, and it's also the second leading cause of cancer deaths. The odds of beating colon cancer increase dramatically with early detection.

Physicians recommend colonoscopy **beginning at age 50 or earlier** if there is a strong family history.

When it comes time to schedule yours, make an appointment with a colorectal surgeon or gastroenterologist at Abington Health. Call 215-481-MEDI or visit www.abingtonhealth.org.

