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Natalie Davis: Surprise Colon Cancer Diagnosis



“Cancer” was not what Natalie Davis was expecting to hear. After all, she was 50 years old. She had no history of [colon cancer](#) in her family. The colonoscopy—her first—was routine. And she felt perfectly fine.

“Life has a sense of humor,” says Davis. “Up until that day, my only exposure to colorectal cancer was writing about it for a paper in grad school.”

Yet in October 2019, Davis found herself in the office of Memorial Hermann Medical Group gastroenterologist [Shaheryar Siddiqui, MD](#), who had performed her colonoscopy at Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital a couple days earlier.

“I explained to Natalie that during the colonoscopy, I found a lesion in her sigmoid colon, which was too large to be removed through a colonoscopy,” says Dr. Siddiqui. “I tattooed the area (marked the area of the lesion on the outside of the colon so that a surgeon could locate it, if surgery were required) and sent a sample to the pathology laboratory to be biopsied. The results indicated she had colon cancer. Fortunately, the cancer had not spread outside the colon, including to the lymph nodes.”

Dr. Siddiqui referred Davis to colon and rectal surgeon [Aakash Gajjar, MD](#), for a surgical consult. Dr. Gajjar saw her that same day.

“Dr. Gajjar explained my situation to me, and we had a conversation about how things could go,” recalls Davis. “I could tell from the conversation he knew what he was doing. I felt comfortable I would be in good hands.”

In December 2019, Dr. Gajjar performed a robotic sigmoid colectomy, a [minimally invasive surgical procedure](#) to remove the diseased part of Davis’ colon. The procedure, which took a few hours, was performed at Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital.

“By using the robot, we can spare the patient an open surgery,” says Dr. Gajjar. “A minimally invasive surgery yields smaller incisions, less pain, a shorter hospital stay, less risk of infection and a faster recovery and return to work.”

“Everything went really well,” says Davis, who describes her surgery as “uneventful.” She was moving around that night and walking the next day.

Because her cancer was caught at an early stage, Davis did not require radiation or chemotherapy. “Early detection through cancer screening is so important,” says Dr. Gajjar. “So many younger people are getting diagnosed with colon cancer these days. Everyone thinks 50 is the age at which you should get your first colonoscopy. But recently, the American Cancer Society began recommending that the general public should start getting colonoscopies at the age of 45*, earlier if a person is experiencing symptoms or has a family history of colon cancer.”

Davis wholeheartedly concurs. “I’ve been telling people, even if you have no symptoms, get screened. By the time you have symptoms, your cancer may have already advanced.”

While her diagnosis came as a surprise, Davis says about a month before her diagnosis, she decided to adopt a more plant-based diet and lost her lifelong “sweet tooth.” “I still eat meat on occasion, but I have added more leafy greens and legumes to my diet,” she says. “And I recently resumed my qigong and yoga practice. I feel better than I did before the cancer.”

December 2022 marked three years since her surgery, and in 2023 Davis says she still feels great!

“I feel as close to ‘normal’ as possible,” she says. “I still focus on eating healthy, because I feel tired and sluggish when I eat junk food. I believe I have found the right balance of foods that keep my body healthy, strong, and well nourished.”

Since beating colon cancer, Davis says she has less stress and more freedom. This is partially because she has a new and exciting job that allows her to enjoy the perks of working from home, and she always believed that everything was going to be ok. She had no doubt that she would successfully recover from the cancer.

Given her own surprise diagnosis, Davis understands that it doesn’t matter if you have a family history or not. “Following the recommended screening guidelines for your age is critical to your health,” she says. “Cancer doesn’t discriminate. The most important thing anyone can do is be proactive with checkups, because it ultimately could save your life.”

*Due to recent changes in screening recommendations, please consult your insurance provider to confirm coverage if you are under age 50.

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