



General Surgery – Diagnostic and Interventional Medicine

Meet Dr. Thomas Bening, General Surgeon

THOMAS BENING, MD, GENERAL SURGEON, joined the Hill Country Memorial Medical Group in January 2020. Dr. Bening performs all types of general surgery operation and endoscopies, including most surgical issues of the GI tract and abdomen, breast surgery, thyroid removal, and skin cancer excisions.

WHAT SERVICES DOES A GENERAL SURGEON PROVIDE?

There are two broad categories:

- 1) we perform all types of surgical procedures, or operations, that fall within our specialty,
- 2) we handle endoscopies, including colonoscopies for cancer screening and upper endoscopies for reflux/swallowing problems.

The overall health and function of a person's gastrointestinal tract affects how a person feels and functions throughout the day.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SCREENING COLONOSCOPY?

Polyps are the key thing we look for in a screening colonoscopy. That's where cancer starts. It is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in the US for both men and women.

If we find a polyp during the procedure we can remove it completely. That allows us to evaluate it for evidence of cancer, and also helps prevent colorectal cancer by having been removed.

WHY ARE SOME RELUCTANT TO GET A COLONOSCOPY?

There is natural anxiety at the thought of this instrument being inserted in the rectum, while you are asleep and exposed. But we only need four people in the room, the patient is under IV sedation so there is no discomfort at all, and only a small area is exposed. Those who have never had one seem most anxious. Most tell me after their first colonoscopy, that it was the best nap they ever had.

Many dread the bowel preparation the day before. But we need to flush out the system, as that's the only way we can obtain a clear view. Otherwise we might miss a polyp.

DO YOU HAVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPTIMAL BOWEL HEALTH?

We do make some general recommendations on diet and supplements. The main ones are to maintain an overall healthy diet with a good amount of fiber and regular moderate exercise.

WHEN SURGERY IS NECESSARY, ARE THERE LESS INVASIVE ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE THROUGH HCM?

Historically, open surgery was much more common. In the 1990s, laparoscopic surgery started taking off. There have been massive advances since, with more precise instrumentation and high-definition cameras to enable us to do more advanced types of surgery.

Robotic surgery takes it to another level, adding the ability to rotate the instruments with a wristed motion, enabling us to get into tight areas and do finer movements without requiring a second surgeon.

WHAT SURGICAL PROCEDURES CAN YOU DO LAPAROSCOPICALLY?

At HCM we can perform all varieties of abdominal wall surgeries, including appendectomies, hernia repair, gall bladder removal, colon resection, and even emergent issues such as bowel obstruction. I perform a variety of anti-reflux operations and hiatal hernia surgeries. Those are often done laparoscopically through several small incisions 5 to 10 millimeters in length.

We can do a wider array of surgeries using smaller incisions, with less post-op pain, that let patients get back to normal activities much sooner.

WHAT OTHER PROCEDURES AND SCREENINGS DO YOU COMMONLY PROVIDE?

Skin cancers and lesions are common in this part of the country. There is a cumulative risk having that exposure to sun over time, so from a screening standpoint, as you get older you should see a dermatologist for any worrisome or suspect lesion. If it is found to be cancerous, you'll get sent to us to have it removed.

IS A REFERRAL REQUIRED FOR A PATIENT TO SEE YOU?

Surgeons generally depend on referrals. But if an individual feels they have an issue, they can contact us directly. Once I evaluate them, I can take them through the process and do the surgery, or get them to the right person if what I provide is not the answer for them.

Especially if someone is dealing with a type of cancer, it is very much a team approach to attack that issue.

Our goal is making sure the person gets the best care they can possibly have.

REMARKABLE SURGICAL CARE

Learn more at
HillCountryMemorial.org/Thomas-Bening

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