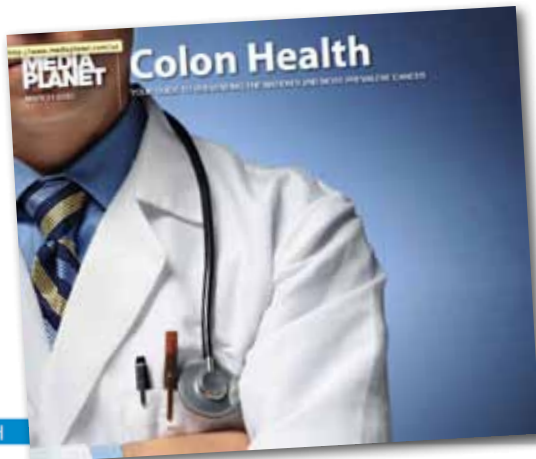


Signature Eyewear's Carmen Marc Valvo Brand



COLON HEALTH

Opening Up About CRC

For a long time Carmen Marc Valvo, one of New York's hottest fashion designers, kept his colon cancer private, even from his closest friends—until he discovered that the silence and the stigma that so often surround this disease almost cost him his life.

"There was something wrong with me. I sensed it," says Carmen. "So I went to the doctor and they did all these tests and they couldn't find anything. Then we did a colonoscopy, and they felt something and right there in the middle of the procedure the doctor says, 'You have cancer and it's the size of a lemon.'"

That's not typically the way physicians share such serious news, but what was equally shocking for Carmen was discovering that he had a family history of colon cancer he knew nothing about.

"I had the tumor removed laparoscopically and they had to remove part of my colon," says Carmen. "Then I found out afterward that I had two family members, one on each side, that had colorectal cancer (CRC). One of the problems with CRC is that nobody wants to talk about it." However, with no family history on record, Carmen's insurance didn't want to cover a colonoscopy until he was 50. "I'm fine now, but my cancer was stage IV when it was detected," explains Carmen. "Had I been forced to wait, my prognosis could have been much different. You need to have full disclosure, you

need to have the family conversation." During his treatment and recovery, Carmen struggled with the kind of "crazy emotional rollercoaster" many cancer patients do. "I love gardening," says Carmen, "so I started weeding and it was like I was weeding the cancer out of my body. Then I decided to plant a cancer garden and I planted all kinds of flowers and that was my way of dealing with the emotional trauma." It also helped Carmen reflect on what he was doing with his life. "When you are dealing with cancer you really reevaluate your life in a strange way." Carmen decided to break his silence

and use his place in the fashion world as a vehicle for raising awareness. "Sometimes fashion can seem so frivolous," says Carmen. "But I love what I do. I love dressing women up, I love helping them feel empowered on their special occasions. Fashion is my passion, but using fashion to raise awareness of CRC gives so much more meaning to what I do; through fashion I can reach so many women with an even more empowering message."

Carmen is now an ambassador for the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance (NCCRA). He has also participated in a host of cancer awareness events, partnering with celebrities like Katie Couric and Vanessa Williams, and the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF). In recognition of his work, he received the first ever Advocate Award from Katie Couric in 2006. Recently, he has



Carmen Marc Valvo

been taking his fashion show on the road to attract attention and raise money for this important cause with retail partners and the AARP. "We've made breast cancer fashionable, we've made ovarian cancer fashionable, I want to make CRC fashionable," says Carmen.