



STOP COLON CANCER BEFORE IT STARTS

Colorectal cancer – commonly known as colon cancer – can often be easily prevented. Yet it remains the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. You have the power to reduce your risk of developing this disease by getting tested.

Ask your doctor when you should begin testing and the best testing method for you. Make an appointment to discuss the issue, or bring it up during your next visit. Through testing, doctors can find polyps before they become cancerous. If pre-cancerous polyps are removed, colon cancer can often be prevented.

The American Cancer Society recommends one of these testing options for all people of average risk beginning at age 50.

Yearly

- Yearly fecal occult blood test (FOBT): a take-home test
- Yearly fecal immunochemical test (FIT): a take-home test

Every Five Years

- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- Yearly FOBT and flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years (preferred over either option alone)
- Double contrast barium enema every five years
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy) every five years – and a follow-up colonoscopy if test is positive

Every Ten Years

- Colonoscopy every ten years
- Stool DNA test (sDNA); Experts are uncertain how often this should be done – but a follow-up colonoscopy is needed if the test is positive

Know Your Risk

Most colon cancers are diagnosed in people 50 or older, so if you fall in this age group, you should begin regular screening. But it is important to ask your doctor if you should begin getting tested earlier. People at higher risk of colon cancer include:

- African Americans
- Those with a personal or family history of colon cancer or polyps
- Individuals with inflammatory bowel disease

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Lower Your Risk

You can lower your risk for developing colon cancer by managing the habits you can control, such as:

- **Activity:** Physical activity is a critical factor in cancer prevention, in part because being active helps to maintain a healthy weight.
- **Diet:** Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods and limit your intake of red meat.
- **Smoking:** Tobacco use raises your risk for colon cancer.

Colon Cancer Terms

Colon cancer develops in the colon or rectum, parts of the digestive tract. It almost always starts with a polyp – a small growth on the lining of the colon or rectum. Finding and removing polyps before they become cancerous can prevent colon cancer from developing. Following are the tests used to diagnose – or rule out – colon cancer.

- A **fecal occult blood test** detects blood in the stool by placing a small sample of stool on a chemically treated card, pad, or wipe; then a chemical developer solution is put on top of the sample. If the card, pad, or cloth turns blue, there's blood in the stool.
- A **barium enema**, or lower gastrointestinal (GI) examination, is an X-ray examination of the large intestine colon and rectum used to help diagnose problems that affect the large intestine. The colon is filled with a contrast material containing barium, which causes the colon to show up clearly on the X-ray picture.
- **Colonoscopy** lets your doctor look at the interior lining of your large intestine (rectum and colon) through a thin, flexible viewing instrument called a colonoscope. A colonoscopy helps detect ulcers, polyps, tumors, and areas of inflammation or bleeding. During a colonoscopy, the doctor can take tissue samples (biopsy) and remove abnormal growths.
- The **colonoscope** is a thin, flexible instrument with a small video camera attached to make photographic, electronic, or videotaped images of the large intestine. The colonoscope is used to view the entire colon as well as a small portion of the lower small intestine.
- Another test called **sigmoidoscopy** shows only the rectum and the lower third of the colon. The **sigmoidoscope** is a lighted tube that may be rigid or flexible. The rigid one shows the rectum and a portion of the lower colon. The flexible one shows around bends in the colon and allows a more complete view of the lower colon.
- **Colon prep:** Before either a colonoscopy or a sigmoidoscopy, you'll need to clean out your colon. For many people, this prep is more trying than the actual test. Plan to stay home during your prep time since you will need to use the bathroom frequently. The colon prep causes loose, frequent stools and diarrhea so that your colon will be empty for the test.

Sources:

American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer, www.cancer.org

WebMD: www.webmd.com