A Guide to Colon Cancer Screening

Why should I get screened?

...because they all depend on me.

...because my girls only have one mom.

...because we practice what we preach.

...because I’m not “too old” for adventure.

...because ‘Grandpa’ never sounded better.

...because I cannot pass 60% off.
Things you can do to help prevent colon cancer:

We don’t know exactly what causes colon cancer, but we know some things that raise your chances of getting colon cancer, like being overweight, eating a lot of red meat, and smoking. Getting tested is the most important thing you can do to prevent colon cancer.

Healthy habits make it less likely that you will get colon cancer. Doing these things lowers your chances of getting colon cancer:

• Eating healthy foods (lots of fruits and vegetables)
• Keeping a healthy weight
• Be active at least 2 hours and 30 minutes each week. Choose activities that make your heart beat faster and your lungs breathe harder. Include activities which make your muscles do more work than usual.
• Not using tobacco

If you are 50 or older, talk to your doctor about getting tested for colon cancer.

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This guide tells about the ways to be tested for colon cancer

What is the purpose of this guide?
• This guide tells you about colon cancer, how it grows and why it is so important to be tested.
• It explains two different ways to be tested to prevent colon cancer. One test is called “colonoscopy” and the other is call a “stool blood test”.
• The guide will help you make choices about getting tested and help you know what will happen when you are tested.

Who needs to be tested?
• People who get colon cancer are usually 50 years of age or older. If you are 50 or older, you need to get tested to prevent colon cancer.
• People who have a family member with colon cancer may need to be tested when they are younger than 50.
• You should be tested before you get any symptoms of colon cancer. When a colon cancer is big enough to cause symptoms, it may be too late to cure it.

Why get tested?
• The best thing about getting tested is that a test can prevent colon cancer.

Answers to questions about the Stool Blood Test

How long does the test take?
• The test itself takes just five minutes a day.

How much discomfort does the test cause?
• There is no discomfort caused by this test.

What can go wrong with the test?
• This test will not cause any harm to your colon.

How good is the test?
• The stool blood test can do much better when it is done every year.
• The stool blood test can be positive even when there is no cancer or polyp in the colon. If you are doing the 3 step test, blood coming from the stomach or from some meat you ate could cause the test to be positive.

Is any follow-up testing needed?
• If the stool blood test is positive for blood you need to get a colonoscopy to find out if colon cancer or a polyp is there.

How often does the test need to be repeated?
• The stool blood test should be repeated every year.
What is colon cancer?

“Colon cancer” is the name for cancer that grows in the colon. Your colon is also called the “large intestine.”

- Your colon is a long, soft tube inside your body where your stools are made out of some things in food your body can’t use. Another name for stool is Bowel Movement or BM.

Who gets colon cancer?

- People are usually 50 or older when they get colon cancer. The older you get, the more likely you are to get colon cancer.
- Men and women have about the same chances of getting colon cancer.
- Most people (75%) who get colon cancer do not have a parent or brother or sister with colon cancer. But having a parent or brother or sister who has colon cancer makes you more likely to get colon cancer.

How common is colon cancer?

- Colon cancer is common.
- One out of every 18 people gets colon cancer.
- Women die from colon cancer almost as much as they do from breast cancer.
- Men die from colon cancer almost as much as they do from prostate cancer.
How does colon cancer grow?

Polyps in the colon are the starting point for colon cancer.

Polyps (pronounced “pol-lips”) grow on the inside of the colon. The drawing below shows that polyps are small growths usually smaller than the size of a pencil eraser.

- Anyone can get a polyp. About 1 in every 3 to 4 adults will get at least one polyp in their colon.
- Polyps don’t cause symptoms, so most people with a polyp don’t know they have them.

Sometimes a polyp grows into cancer.

- Polyps grow very slowly, so it can take up to 10 years for a polyp to turn into cancer. A small cancer usually does not cause symptoms.
- The drawing below shows a polyp that has grown and turned into cancer.

Answers to questions about colonoscopy

How long does the test take?

- The test itself takes about 20 minutes, but you will be at the hospital or clinic for 2 – 3 hours all together.
- After the test you have to stay at home for the rest of the day to let the medicine you got wear off.

How much discomfort does the test cause?

- You should not feel much discomfort because you get medicine to make you sleepy and ease any discomfort you might have.

What can go wrong with the test?

- The test can make a tear in the wall of the colon. You would have to have surgery to fix the tear.
- Only 1 person in about 2,500 people who get this test have a problem that may need more medical care.

How good is the test?

- Colonoscopy looks at the whole colon and finds more than 90% of large polyps and cancers and about 70% of small polyps.

Is any follow-up testing needed?

- If everything is normal, no.

How often does the test need to be repeated?

- If you have the test and no polyps are found, you should have the test again in about 10 years. Polyps grow very slowly and a polyp takes about 10 years to get big enough to worry about.
Colonoscopy covers the whole colon, continued...

Getting the test

• On the day of the test you go to the hospital or a clinic, and you lie down on your side on a bed.
  • You will be given a medicine that will make you drowsy, help you relax and ease your pain.
  • You are usually so sleepy you do not see or feel much of what happens.

• After the test you go into another room and rest in a bed until you wake up and can walk OK.

• You need to have someone drive you home after the test. You will not be allowed to drive home by yourself or take a bus because you will still be too sleepy from the medicine.

A tiny camera shows the inside of the colon on a TV screen.

The doctor puts the scope into the rectum and slowly pushes it inside the colon, all the way to the end. The doctor can remove any polyps he/she finds.

How does colon cancer grow, continued...

When a cancer gets large, it can block the colon and cause symptoms.

A doctor can take out a large cancer, but it takes a big operation. And many times some cancer is left behind. Many large cancers cannot be cured.

These are some symptoms caused by a large colon cancer:

• Blood in stool (bowel movement) or in the toilet bowl
• Changes in your bowel movements for no reason

If you have any of these symptoms be sure to tell your doctor. Having these warning signs might mean colon cancer or might mean something else.

Remember, there are no symptoms when a colon cancer is small.

It is important to get tested to find colon polyps and cancer when you don’t have any symptoms. Polyps and small cancers can be easily removed so they don’t continue to grow.
The rest of this guide is about 2 tests for colon cancer:

1. Colonoscopy (kole-on-OSS-ko-pee)
   - A doctor uses a thin, soft tube with a tiny camera to look for polyps anywhere in the whole colon.
   
   The doctor can remove any polyps he finds.

2. Stool Blood Test
   - This test may use a special kit at home to determine whether the stool (bowel movement) contains blood.

You use this home kit to send stool samples. Some tests use 2 steps; some tests use 3 steps.
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Colonoscopy covers the whole colon

A doctor uses a thin, soft tube with a tiny camera to look for polyps anywhere in the whole colon.

Getting ready for the test

- The day before the test you cannot eat any solid food. You can only drink water and clear liquids. Clear liquids include apple juice, jello (except red) and clear broth.

- The evening before the test you take a laxative to clean all of the stool out of the colon. You will have several watery stools (diarrhea). When you get a colonoscopy, the doctor looks at the inside of the whole colon from the beginning to the end. It is very important that your colon does not have any stool in it at the time of the test.
Colonoscopy covers the whole colon, continued...

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The Stool Blood Test looks for blood in a Bowel Movement (BM).

Getting ready for the test

- Your doctor may give you a 2 or 3 step test.

If you do the 3 step test:

- Your doctor may ask you to stop eating certain foods, vegetables and red meat for a few days before you do the test. These can cause the test to give a false reading.

- You are not allowed to take aspirin, Advil, Motrin or similar medications for a week before the test. These medicines can cause a little bleeding from the stomach that can give a false reading on the test.

Doing the test

- You need to put a sample from your stool (bowel movement) on a card on 2 or 3 consecutive bowel movements, depending on the test the doctor gives you.

- You can collect part of your stool in a plastic cup or on a special pad in the toilet bowl.

- When all 3 cards are done you can put them in a plastic envelope that comes with the cards and mail them back to the doctor’s office. Or you can take them back to your doctor.

- Your doctor will test the cards with a chemical that shows if any blood was hidden in the sample of stool on the card. Hidden blood may mean you have a polyp. It may also mean other things that are not cancer.
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it could save your life.
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...because I have a lot of cooking to do.

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For further information:

www.mass.gov/dph/cancer

Información en español disponible en

www.cdc.gov/spanish/cancer/colorectal/basic_info