



Colorectal cancer: Testing could save your life

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in men and women combined in the United States. Colorectal cancer is a “silent” disease because precancerous polyps and early-stage colorectal cancer do not always have symptoms. This means that someone could have colorectal cancer and not know it until the cancer is advanced and more difficult to cure.

Colon cancer, if found and treated early, before symptoms develop, has a high cure rate. Most colon cancers start as non-cancerous growths called polyps. If polyps are removed, cancer may be prevented. That is why having a screening test is so important.

If everyone aged 45 years or older had regular screening tests, at least 60 percent of the deaths from this cancer could be avoided.

Who gets colorectal cancer?

Both men and women equally, of all ages and nationalities, can get colorectal cancer. However, the risk for getting colorectal cancer increases with age, and is most often found in people 45 or older. Other risk factors include:

- Obesity
- Excessive alcohol use
- Tobacco use
- Physical inactivity
- A high fat diet



Are you high risk?

The risk for colorectal cancer may be higher than average if:

- You or a close relative have had colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- You have inflammatory bowel disease.
- You are African American, Native American, or a member of other ethnic group that may be at increased risk; you should speak to your health care provider to begin screening five to ten years earlier than age 45.

What are the symptoms of colorectal cancer?

Some people with polyps or colorectal cancer may develop symptoms. These symptoms may include:

- Blood in or on your stool
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that do not go away
- Unexplained weight loss
- Change in bowel habits
- Change in stool consistency

Your chances of preventing colon cancer increase if you take care of yourself, visit your health care provider regularly and talk to them about any symptoms that may signal medical problems. It's always better to prevent illness than to treat it.

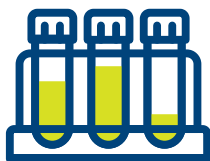
If you have not been screened or if you are not sure if you are up to date with your screenings, call your health care provider to schedule a visit.

Colorectal cancer screening tests

There are several types of screening tests that can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer.



Visual exams, such as colonoscopy, virtual colonoscopy, or flexible sigmoidoscopy.



Stool tests, such as the fecal immunochemical test (FIT) or the FIT-DNA test can be completed at home with a test kit. The sample is then returned to your doctor or a lab.



Blood tests, which can be completed at your doctor's office.

Which test is best for you depends on your risk factors, but most importantly, the best test is the one you will actually have done. A colonoscopy is generally considered the gold standard of screening tests because it is the only one that can both find and remove polyps during the same procedure. Anyone who is at high risk for colorectal cancer should get a colonoscopy. With the other screening tests, if the result is positive, you will also need a colonoscopy.



Talk to your health care provider about the best screening options for you.