

Colorectal Cancer Screening Can Save Your Life

Colorectal cancer—that is, cancer of the colon (large intestine) and/or rectum—is one of the most frequent causes of cancer death in women, and is the third highest cause of death, exceeded only by breast and lung cancers. There are often no early warning signs; you can still feel healthy and develop colorectal cancer (CRC). According to the American Cancer Society, CRC is one of the most curable forms of cancer, and screening improves your chances of preventing or curing CRC. After age 50 years, your chances of developing CRC increase; therefore, if you have any of the following risk factors, such as those listed in bullets below, or are age 50 years or over, you need to be screened.

The American Cancer Society recommends the following preventive measures:

- Eat a variety of healthy foods, including plenty of vegetables
- Be physically active
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Limit alcohol consumption.

Even if you adhere to all the above recommendations, you still must be screened periodically, primarily because your risk of developing CRC increases with age.

The good news is that CRC is a disease that, if caught early, usually can be cured. Your health

care provider can explain the screening options available to you.

Screening can identify or diagnose CRC, and treatment can be started before the cancer spreads. In addition, screening can also detect polyps (small growths in your intestine) that can be removed before they become cancerous or malignant.

Why should you be screened for CRC?

The American Cancer Society recommends that you be screened for CRC if you:

- Are age 50 years and over
- Have a family history of colorectal cancer
- Have had intestinal polyps in the past
- Have a personal history of endometrial, ovarian, or breast cancer
- Have had a first-degree relative with CRC or a history of colon polyps diagnosed before age 60 years
- Have a family history of hereditary CRC syndrome, such as familial adenomatous polyposis or hereditary non-polyposis CRC.

Source:

American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2002. Special section: Colorectal Cancer and Early Detection.

<http://www.cancer.org/downloads/stt/cancer-facts&figures2002tm.pdf>

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Patient Handout

What screening options are available?

Test	Advantages	Bowel prep needed?	Other comments	Cost	How often?
Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for low-risk persons if done annually • At-home test 	No bowel prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will miss most polyps and some cancers that do not bleed • Pre-test dietary limitations • More effective if combined with flexible sigmoidoscopy 	Low cost (~\$20)	Once a year
Stool-based DNA test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At-home stool collection • Analyzes DNA in stool for the presence of cancer or precancer • No sample touching • More effective than FOBT 	No bowel prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For patients unwilling or unable to have a colonoscopy • Can only detect some polyps • Less sensitive than colonoscopy 	\$600-\$700	Once every 3-5 years
Flexible sigmoidoscopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal discomfort • Generally quick • More effective than FOBT • No sedation needed 	Oral solution or 2 enemas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually views only one third of colon • Cannot remove all polyps • More effective if combined with FOBT 	\$150-\$250	Once every 5 years
Double-contrast barium enema	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can usually view all of colon • No sedation needed 	Full bowel and colon cleansing and air distension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can miss small polyps and cancers • Some false-positives 	\$300-\$400	Once every 5 years
Colonoscopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can usually view all of colon • Can biopsy and remove polyps 	Full bowel and colon cleansing and air distension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sedation may be needed • Missed day of work possible 	~\$1,000-\$2,500	Once every 10 years
Virtual colonoscopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for frail and elderly • Can view entire colon 	Full bowel and colon cleansing and air distension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot be used for removal of polyps • Not yet clinically proven to work 	\$750-\$1,500	Once every 5 years

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