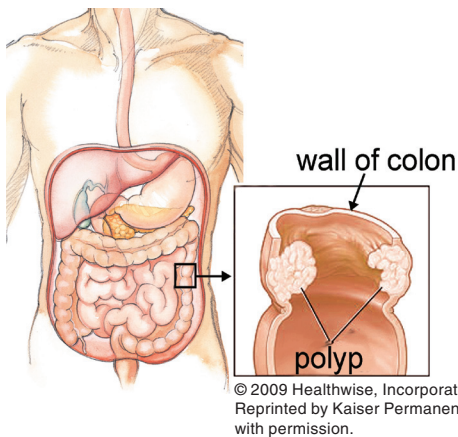




# Why Should I Be Tested for Colorectal Cancer?

Colon cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in the United States. Because colon cancer can easily be prevented, regular screening is important. Talk with your doctor about your choices. Together, you can decide the best plan for you.

## How does colon cancer develop?



Colon cancer starts in the large intestine and usually grows slowly, sometimes over many years. Colon cancer most often originates with small groups of cells called polyps. Although most polyps are not cancerous, some can grow and become cancerous over time.

## Why should I be tested for colon cancer?

It is important to be tested because colon cancer is preventable if polyps are found early. Most people do not know if they have polyps because they are so small. With regular colon cancer screening, your doctor can

find and remove polyps before they turn into cancer. Even if your doctor finds polyps that are cancerous, you have a good chance of being cured.

## Who should be screened for colon cancer, and when?

If you are a healthy adult between 50 and 75 years of age, you should be screened for colon cancer once a year. There are many screening options. Your doctor can help you choose the best test for you and decide how often you need screening.

## Could I be at high risk for colon cancer?

Men and women are at equal risk for colon cancer, but people with a personal history or a strong family history of colon cancer are at a higher risk than others. If you are at high risk for colon cancer, you need special screening. Talk with your doctor about when and how often to get tested if any of the following are true for you:

- You have had colon cancer.
- Your sister, brother, parent, or child has had colon cancer before the age of 55.
- Two or more of your sisters, brothers, parents, or children had colon cancer at any age.

Patients with inflammatory bowel disease are also at increased risk and should discuss when to start regular colonoscopy screening with their doctor.

## What are the tests for colon cancer?

There are many different tests that can help find colon cancer. The three most common and most effective are a stool test (sometimes called an FOBT or FIT test), a flexible sigmoidoscopy (flex sig), and a colonoscopy. You and your doctor can choose which test is best for you.

## The stool test - Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)

A stool test is a quick test with no known side effects. It is recommended for patients who are at standard or average risk for colon cancer. It is the easiest and most convenient test since it does not require a visit to your doctor's office. You do not have to prepare for the test or make any special changes to your diet.

You do the test at home using a test kit (a FIT kit) that you get in the mail or at one of our medical centers. After you have a bowel movement, you collect a small sample of your stool. You then follow the instructions in the kit to mail the sample to our Kaiser Permanente lab free of charge. If the lab finds blood in your stool, your doctor will ask for a follow up test called a colonoscopy.

The stool test Kaiser Permanente uses is now easier and more accurate than ever. The FIT test is quick and convenient, and by taking it, you

take an important step in protecting your health.

## Flexible sigmoidoscopy (Flex sig)

A flex sig is a test done in the doctor's office while you are fully awake. You will need to take several enemas or an oral laxative two hours before the exam to clear your lower colon and rectum.

During the test, a trained doctor or nurse uses a thin flexible tube to look at the rectum and the lower part of the colon. If your doctor finds any polyps, he or she will recommend a colonoscopy to look at the entire colon and to have the polyps removed.

Many people say this test makes them feel like they need to go to the bathroom. Most people have some cramping or bloating during the 5 to 10 minutes it takes to do the test. After the test is over, this feeling usually goes away quickly and you should be able to go back to your regular activities. You may want to plan for time to rest after the test in case you feel bloated or have gas.

## Colonoscopy

A colonoscopy is like a flex sig, but involves looking at your whole colon. If your doctor finds polyps, he or she can remove them during the colonoscopy.

We do colonoscopies in the hospital or in an outpatient clinic. You will be fully sedated so you are comfortable and relaxed during the procedure. You will prepare for the

colonoscopy one to two days before by drinking a fluid that has a strong laxative to clear out your colon. Many people stay home the day before because the laxative causes loose, frequent stools. After the test, you may have some bloating and discomfort. You will not be allowed to drive so you will need a ride home after the procedure.

This test has moderate risks including bleeding, problems from sedation, and damage to the colon wall. Because of these risks, we only recommend colonoscopies for patients who are at higher risk for colon cancer, or as a follow up from an abnormal stool test result. Starting at approximately age 65, patients may want to discuss colonoscopy screening with their doctor since colorectal cancer and polyps become more common as people get older.

For either a flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy, you may need a referral from your doctor.

## How can I reduce my risk of colon cancer?

Here are some things that you can do to reduce your risk for colon cancer:

- Talk to your doctor or health care professional about which screening test is right for you.
- Eat foods low in fat and high in soluble fiber. This may help reduce your risk of colon cancer by regularly moving waste out of your bowels.
- Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

- Eat bran cereals, whole grains and whole wheat breads, cooked beans, peas, and popcorn.
- Quit smoking. If you smoke, we can help you quit. Ask your doctor for resources, or contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department.
- Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity (like walking or yard work, or higher intensity activities like swimming or cycling) on most days of the week. Physical activity can also help improve your overall health.

## How do I schedule a colon cancer screening?

If you are age 50 or above, we will send you a colon cancer screening test kit (FIT kit) once a year. It is important to do the test and send it back to us so you stay up to date with your screenings. If you are at high risk for colon cancer or have any of the symptoms described above, call your doctor to schedule an office screening test. You should also talk to your health care professional if you are having persistent rectal pain or bleeding, diarrhea, constipation, or stomach pain.

### Other resources

- Connect to our website at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- Visit the American Cancer Society at **cancer.org**.

If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org)

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

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