

# Colorectal Cancer Screening

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## What is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or rectum. It is sometimes called colon cancer. The colon is another name for the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum connects the colon to the anus. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Both men and women get it and it is most often found in people over age 50. The risk increases with a family history of the disease and with age. It is also increased with inflammatory bowel disease. People at higher risk may need earlier and more frequent screening tests.

## Screening Saves Lives

Screening for the general population is recommended starting at age 50. The cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum. The polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there. Some polyps over time can turn into cancer. Screening tests look for polyps so they can be removed before they have a chance to become a cancer. Screening can also detect early cancer which is most easily cured. Screening is important to detect precancerous polyps and early –stage colon-rectal cancer as these conditions don't always cause symptoms with early disease. Symptoms may include blood in the stool (bowel movement), stomach pain, aches, cramps that don't go away or unexplained weight loss.

## Types of Screening Tests

Screening tests are often used in combination with each other.

**Fecal occult blood testing** uses chemical or antibodies to detect blood in the stool. Done once yearly.

**Colonoscopy** is a long, thin, flexible, lighted tube used to view the entire colon for polyps or cancer. During the test most polyps and some cancers can be removed. Usually performed every 10 years.

**Barium Enema** is an enema done with barium and air to create an outline of the colon wall that can be visualized with xrays. Usually performed every 5 years.

**Flexible sigmoidoscopy** is a shorter, thin, flexible, lighted tube that can be used to view the lower 1/3 of the colon. Usually performed every 5 years.

For more information see the American Cancer Society web site: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)