

Colon Cancer Screening

Do It For Yourself,
Do It For Those Who Love You!



A booklet developed especially for

Jane Doe

by the Colon Health Initiative:
A program of Indiana University School of Nursing,
funded by the National Cancer Institute

Remember these important facts...

Colon cancer:

- ◆ **is the second leading cause of cancer death**—second only to lung cancer
- ◆ **often has no symptoms**
- ◆ **affects both men and women**, and people of all races

Most importantly:

- ◆ **people with a family history of colon cancer have a higher risk of getting this disease**
- ◆ **colon cancer can be prevented by removing polyps before they turn into cancer**

The most effective step you can take to protect yourself is to get your colon examined—not just once, but on a regular schedule. Talk with your doctor about your lowering your cancer risk through screening. Bring this booklet along on your next doctor visit to help you remember to talk about colon testing.

Other things **you can do** to lower your risk for colon cancer are:

- ◆ **maintain a healthy weight**
- ◆ **eat lots of fruits and vegetables** (9 servings EACH day is recommended)
- ◆ **avoid foods high in fat**
- ◆ **avoid tobacco, drink alcohol in moderation** (if at all)
- ◆ **exercise regularly**

For more information, contact:

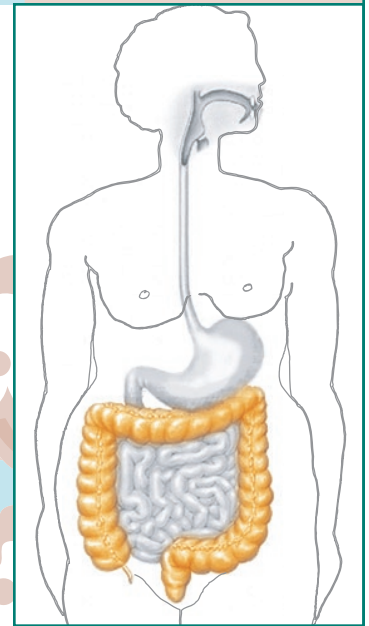
The National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4-CANCER or visit their website at www.nci.gov.

The American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit their website at: www.acs.org.

Indiana University School of Nursing Indianapolis, Colon Health Initiative, Linda Scott, MS, at 317.278.0365.

Protecting Yourself Against Colon Cancer: What You Need To Know

You may not have thought much about having your colon examined. As a close relative of someone who has been touched by colon or rectal cancer, screening is especially important for you. This booklet will tell you how colon cancer develops. Then, we will give you some information about your personal risk for getting this disease. Finally, we will review some things that might concern you about colon testing, so you can get ready. Let's begin by looking at how colon cancer develops.

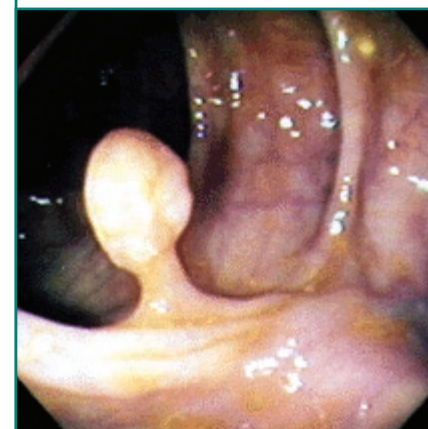


What Is Colon Cancer?

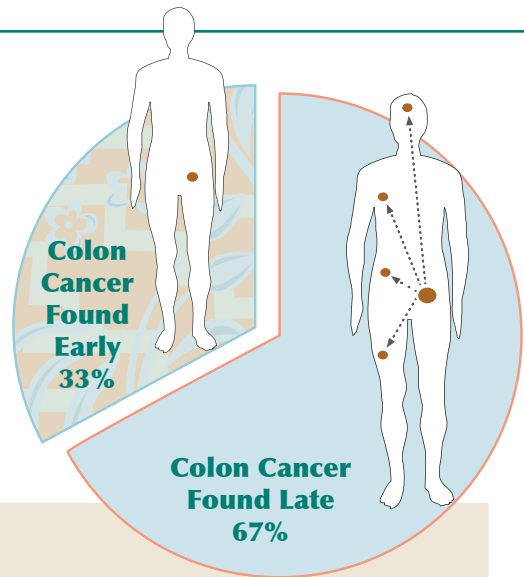
Cancer can develop in many parts of the body, including your colon, also called the large intestine. Your colon helps digest food and plays an important role in keeping you healthy. This diagram shows the digestive system, which starts at your mouth and includes your esophagus (swallowing tube), stomach, small intestine, and large intestine ending at the rectum. Scientists are still working to find out exactly what causes colon cancer, but we do know what the risk factors are and how you can lower your chances of getting this disease.

Can Colon Cancer Be Prevented?

Today, we are fortunate because most colon cancer can actually be prevented through regular testing called colon cancer screening.



Your colon (or large intestine) helps digest food and plays an important role in keeping you healthy. Here is a picture of the inside of a colon. Most colon cancer starts out as a polyp; a small non-cancerous lump that grows from the lining of the colon. Polyps that look like this would turn into cancer if they were left alone. But because it takes 3-12 years for a polyp to become cancer, we can find and remove them long before they do. Having your colon examined for polyps regularly is one of the BEST things you can do to protect yourself against colon cancer.

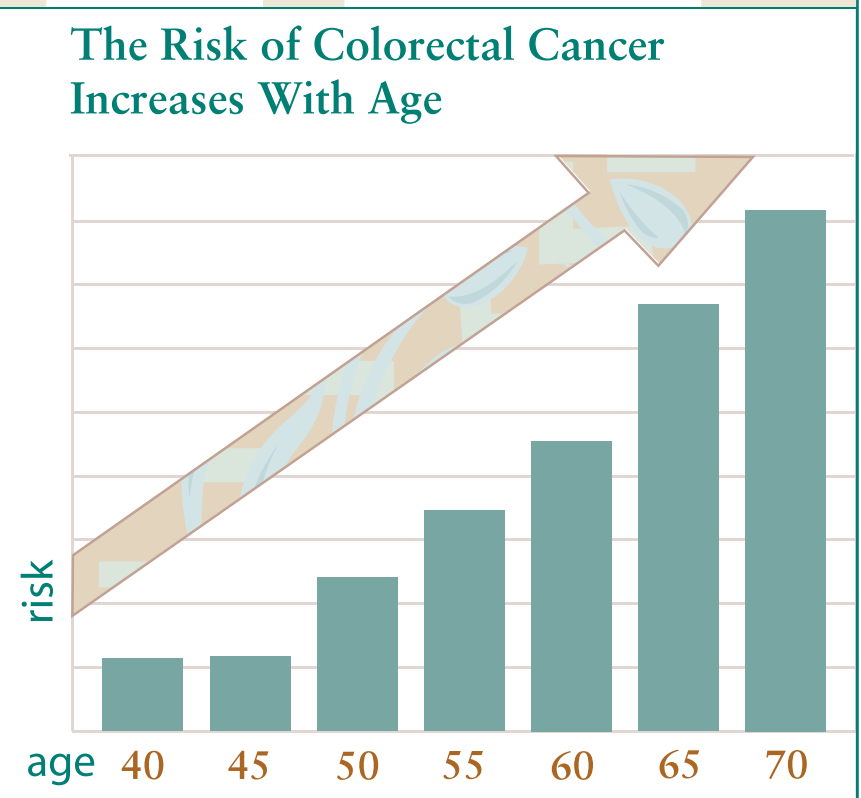


What if a polyp has already turned into cancer? Colon testing can also help find cancer, if it does develop, early enough so that it can still be cured. If colon cancer is found before it spreads to other parts of your body, a complete cure is possible 95% of the time. Unfortunately, because most people don't have their colon examined regularly, only about one third of colon cancer is found early. Everyone, both men and women, 50 and older should be screened for colon cancer. However, since you have a close relative who had this disease, screening is especially important and should start at age 40.

What Are The Risk Factors?

As you may already know, there are several risk factors that increase people's chances of getting colon cancer. The major factors that increase a person's risk are:

- 1** Getting older.
- 2** Having had colon cancer or colon polyps in the past.
- 3** Having an inflammatory bowel disease such as ulcerative colitis (ko-ly-tis) or Crohn's (kronz) disease.
- 4** Having one or more relatives who had colon cancer.



There's never enough time, especially for something like colon testing. We have to take time to do things that are important and this is definitely one of them. You wouldn't have much time left if you had found out too late that you had colon cancer. NOW is the time to make your colon health a priority.

For people with a family history of colon cancer, almost all insurance plans cover the cost of a colonoscopy. If you aren't sure whether or how much of the cost will be covered, check with your insurance plan before you make a decision.

Sometimes doctors get so busy taking care of patients when they're sick, that they don't take enough time to talk about things you can do to stay healthy...like having a colonoscopy. That's why we developed this booklet for you to help you discuss these colon tests with your doctor the next time you see him or her. You and your doctor will be glad you did!

It's only natural to have concerns but don't let them keep you from this life-saving step.



What's Holding You Back?

Even though having a colonoscopy is very important, it's natural to have concerns about having one. Don't let those concerns keep you from taking this life-saving step. You told us you were most concerned about ...



Some people put off having a colonoscopy because they think it's embarrassing.

Remember, the doctors and nurses who do these tests are professionals and do them every day. They are careful to keep you covered during the procedure and explain what they are seeing in your colon. You won't die from embarrassment, but you could die from colon cancer. Getting colon cancer because you were too embarrassed to get checked just doesn't make sense!

You should get a colonoscopy. It's very important and could help save your life.

A Personal Colon Cancer Risk Profile for Jane Doe

First, let's review the factors that increase your personal chance of getting colon cancer. Then we'll talk about what you can do to lower your chance of getting it. Risk of getting colon cancer increases with age. Since you're now 43, your chance of getting colon cancer is higher than it was when you were younger. What's more, your risk will continue to increase as you get older.

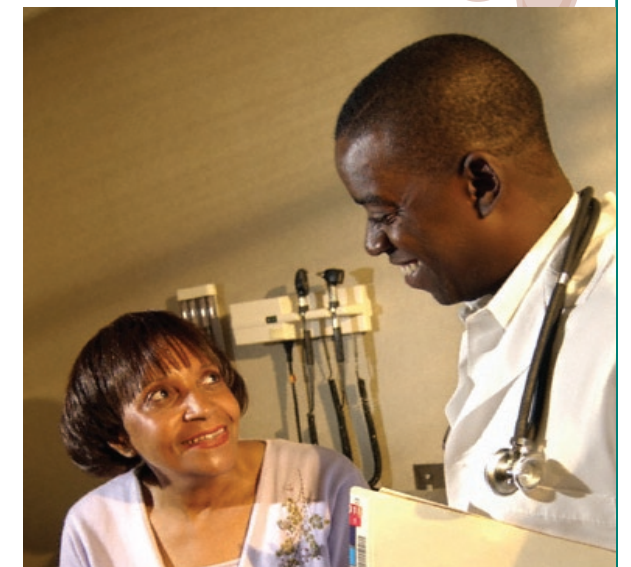
In addition to getting older, you've had 1 close relative who had cancer of the colon or rectum before they were 60 years old. This means your chances of getting colon or rectal cancer are higher than those of most people your age.

Your Risk Factors

- Being 43
- Having a family member who had colon or rectal cancer at a young age

What Can You Do To Lower Your Risk?

Begin screening now, if you haven't already. The American Cancer Society suggests having your entire colon checked by colonoscopy every 5 years, beginning at age 40, or when you are ten years younger than your relative's age when the cancer was found, whichever comes first. Talk with your doctor about getting screened soon.



Getting Screened

As you know, getting screened for colon cancer is very important for everyone as they get older, but is especially important for you. Having a doctor examine your colon with a colonoscopy is the best way to accomplish two things:

- 1 Prevent cancer** by finding and removing polyps.
- OR
- 2 Find cancer early** when the chance for cure is very high.

Experts believe that colon cancer death rates are going down because both polyps and cancers are being found early through regular colon testing.

Colonoscopy

The best way for you to have your colon examined is with a colonoscopy.

A colonoscopy (koh-lun-os-kup-ee) is a colon screening test that allows a doctor to look inside the entire length of your colon. During a colonoscopy, the doctor inserts a long, flexible tube with a light into your rectum to examine your entire colon for any unusual growths. Right before the test, they give you some medicine to help you relax. Most people fall asleep during the test. The test takes between 30 minutes and an hour, depending on whether there are any growths or polyps that need to be removed. Afterward, you wait for the relaxing medicine to wear off, and someone needs to drive you home. You will not be able to drive or work for the rest of that day because it takes several hours for the medicine to wear off.



Preparing for a colonoscopy

One very important part of having a colonoscopy is preparing for the test the day before. Your colon needs to be completely empty so the doctor can see the inside clearly. To clean out your colon, you will need to do three things on the day before your colonoscopy:

- 1 Stop eating solid foods.**
- 2 Stop taking certain medicines.**
- 3 Drink a special laxative to clean out your colon.**

As you can imagine, you will spend some time in the bathroom. But this is a very important step in having a colonoscopy. You can do it!

Talk with your doctor now about having a colonoscopy.

