

Luckily, lifesaving colon tests are more comfortable than ever and are covered by Medicare and most health insurers. According to the American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of colorectal cancer, starting at age 50, both men and women should have:

- **Yearly fecal occult blood test (FOBT) and flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years; or**
- **Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years; or**
- **FOBT yearly; or**
- **Colonoscopy every 10 years; or**
- **Double-contrast barium enema every five years.**

*Note: Flexible sigmoidoscopy together with FOBT is preferred when compared to FOBT or flexible sigmoidoscopy alone. All positive tests should be followed up with colonoscopy. People at increased or high risk should talk with their doctor about a different screening schedule.*

To find out more about staying healthy and preventing cancer, call your American Cancer Society.

**Colon  
Testing  
Can  
Save  
Your  
Life!**

1.800.ACS.2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**Hope. Progress. Answers.**



## What you need to know

### about colon cancer.

You feel fine and try to take care of your health. Great! But you're still at risk for colon cancer and you should get tested regularly if you're 50 or older.

- Colon cancer is the second leading cancer killer in America, but the great news is that colon testing can save your life and even prevent colon cancer.
- Testing can find non-cancerous colon polyps or colon cancer early, when they can be easily removed or cured. Polyps are small growths that may turn into cancer if not removed.
- Colon cancer is most common in men and women over 50.
- People with a personal history of polyps, colorectal cancer, or inflammatory bowel disease, or a family history of colon cancer or polyps are at higher risk for colon cancer and may need to start being tested before age 50, and have the tests done more often.
- A family history of other cancers (breast, ovarian, or uterine) may also raise one's risk for colon cancer.
- African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews appear to have higher rates of colon cancer.

Early colon cancer often has no symptoms. But, later on, colon cancer symptoms may include rectal bleeding, stomach cramps, weight loss, a change in bowel habits, or just feeling tired. If you have any of the above symptoms, see your doctor to make sure colon cancer isn't the cause.

## What else can you do to lower your risk of colon cancer?

- Ask relatives about your family's cancer history.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes on most days.
- Eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruits daily.
- Avoid tobacco, and drink alcohol in moderation if you drink at all.
- Stay at your ideal weight.

*This chart can help you and your doctor decide which testing option is right for you:*

Screening Test	Advantages	Disadvantages/Limitations
Fecal Occult Blood Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No bowel preparation</li> <li>• Sampling is done at home</li> <li>• Cheap</li> <li>• Proven effective in clinical trials</li> <li>• No risk of bowel tears or infections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May miss many polyps and some cancers</li> <li>• May produce false-positive test results</li> <li>• Pre-test dietary limitations needed</li> <li>• Must be done every year</li> <li>• More effective when combined with a flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years</li> <li>• Additional procedures necessary if abnormalities are detected</li> </ul>
Flexible Sigmoidoscopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairly quick and safe</li> <li>• Minimal bowel preparation</li> <li>• Done every five years</li> <li>• Not that uncomfortable</li> <li>• Doesn't require a specialist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually views only about a third of the colon</li> <li>• Can't remove all polyps</li> <li>• Very small risk of infection or bowel tear</li> <li>• More effective when combined with annual fecal occult blood testing</li> <li>• Additional procedures necessary if abnormalities are detected</li> </ul>
Barium Enema	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can usually view entire colon</li> <li>• Relatively safe</li> <li>• Done every five years</li> <li>• No sedation needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can miss small polyps and cancers</li> <li>• Full bowel preparation needed</li> <li>• Some false-positive test results</li> <li>• Additional procedures necessary if abnormalities are detected</li> </ul>
Colonoscopy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can usually view entire colon</li> <li>• Can biopsy and remove polyps</li> <li>• Done every 10 years</li> <li>• Can diagnose other diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can miss small polyps</li> <li>• Full bowel preparation needed</li> <li>• Can be expensive</li> <li>• Sedation of some kind usually needed</li> <li>• You may miss a day of work</li> <li>• Higher risk of bowel tears or infections than other screening methods</li> </ul>
	\$150	\$400
	\$400	\$1400

*Note: Test prices are estimates — costs and reimbursement rates will vary by state and insurer.*