

UofMN Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

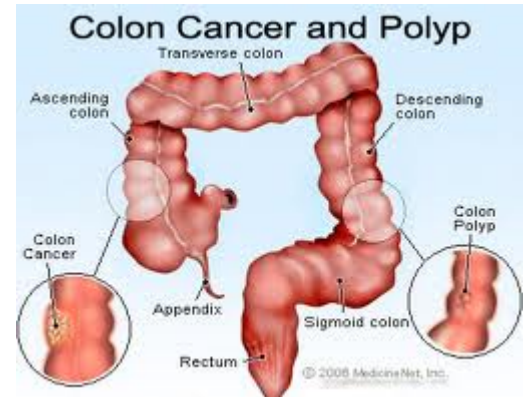
Title: Colon Cancer Screening

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WHAT IS COLON CANCER?

-Your **colon (or large intestine)** is located in your belly. It is the last part of your **digestive system** and attaches to your **rectum/anus**. The colon helps absorb the fluids you drink and helps form your stool, which is the waste from the food you eat.

-Some people develop abnormal growths in their colons that can invade the normal colon tissue, this is known as **cancer**. Cancer can spread to other parts of your body and cause serious illness or even death.
-Most colon cancers develop slowly over many years and start out as abnormal tissue growths known as **POLYPS**. Importantly, these polyps can be detected with colon cancer screening and can be removed to **prevent cancer** from forming.



WHAT ARE RISK FACTORS FOR COLON CANCER?

-**AGE:** colon cancer is most common after age 50 and the risk increases as you grow older.
-**FAMILY HISTORY:** Having a first degree relative (mom, dad, brother, sister, or children) with colon cancer increases your risk.
-Having been diagnosed with **ULCERATIVE COLITIS OR CHRON'S DISEASE** increases your risk.
-**POLYPS:** having these abnormal growths inside your colon that may turn into cancer increases your risk.
-Other risk factors include diets high in red and processed meats, physical inactivity, obesity, smoking, alcohol use, and type II diabetes.

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE SIGN/SYMPTOMS OF COLON CANCER?

-**Colon cancer may cause all, none, or some of the symptoms below.** If you have any of the following you should make a visit to see your doctor:

- Diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stools, that lasts for more than a few days.
- **Blood** in your stool, blood on the toilet paper, really dark or black stools.
- Continued cramping or pain in your belly.
- Continued weakness and fatigue.
- Losing weight when you are not trying too.

-Most of the time the above symptoms are caused by problems other than colorectal cancer, these problems include infection, hemorrhoids, or inflammatory bowel disease. Still, if you have any of these problems, it's important to see your doctor right away so the cause can be found and treated, if needed.

WHY IS COLON CANCER SCREENING IMPORTANT?

-Colon cancer is the **SECOND leading cause of cancer related deaths** in the United States.
-An estimated 49,380 Americans will die from colon cancer in 2011 according to American Cancer Society.
-It is estimated that colon **cancer affects 1 in 20 people** in their lifetime.
-Colon cancer can be **PREVENTED** and treated better with **EARLY** detection.

HOW I AM USUALLY SCREENED FOR COLON CANCER?

-**COLONOSCOPY**: Is the best and most recommended test to detect and help prevent colon cancer. It involves a flexible camera being inserted up into your colon. The camera is driven by a doctor while video of the inside your colon is being watched to look for cancer and to find and remove any polyps. The procedure is very safe and patients are sedated and relaxed during the procedure and most don't remember the procedure.

-**ANNUAL FIT TESTING**: Take home test kit, you collect your own stool sample and mail it in. The test looks for evidence of blood in your stool that you can't see with your eyes. This test is for people not willing to have the highly recommended colonoscopy. This test is good at finding advanced cancer but is very bad at detecting polyps and preventing cancer like colonoscopy.

HOW OFTEN AM I SCREENED FOR COLON CANCER?

-People **without** a family history (mom/dad/brother/sister) with colon cancer should have their 1st colonoscopy screening **at 50 years old** (African Americans starting at 45 years old) and **repeat colonoscopy every ten years** if no cancer or polyps are found.

-People **with** a family history (mom/dad/brother/sister) with colon cancer should have their 1st colonoscopy starting 10 years before the age the cancer was discovered in their family member and repeat every ten years if no cancer or polyps are found.

-People choosing not to have a colonoscopy should perform a FIT test every year starting at age 50. If a fit test returns positive you are required to have a colonoscopy to rule out cancer or polyps.

I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT COLON CANCER, WHERE CAN I GO?

Additional resources:

American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/ColonandRectumCancer/MoreInformation/ColonandRectumCancerEarlyDetection/colorectal-cancer-early-detection-toc>

MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/colorectalcancer.html>

American College of Gastroenterology

Web site: www.acg.gi.org

C3: Colorectal Cancer Coalition

Toll-free number: 1-877-427-2111 (1-877-4CRC-111)

Web site: www.fightcolorectalcancer.org

Keywords:

Colon Cancer

Colonoscopy

FIT Testing

Cancer Screening

Polyps

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.