



Colon Cancer Screening Fact Sheet

Test Type: Colonoscopy

Anyone can get colon cancer. It can affect people of all racial and ethnic groups. Routine screening can help your health care provider find cancers earlier, when they are easier to treat. Screening may also prevent cancer, by finding and removing polyps or abnormal growths from the colon.

There are different test options for screening. Talk with your provider to choose the test that is right for you.

Who? People at average risk for colon cancer may have a colonoscopy to screen for colon cancer. Talk with your health care provider about what age to begin screening. If you are at an increased risk of colon cancer, you may need screening early. Discuss your medical and family medical history with your provider before choosing a test. Tell them if you have any of these risk factors:

- ▶ A history of colon cancer or precancerous polyps
- ▶ A parent, sibling or child with colon cancer or precancerous polyps
- ▶ Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC), also called Lynch syndrome
- ▶ Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease

What? When you have a colonoscopy, a health care provider uses a small camera to look for unusual tissue in your colon and rectum and remove polyps or abnormal growths. Doing this can prevent cancer from developing or help find it early if it is already present. Your provider will give you anesthesia (medication) that makes you sleepy before the test. During the test, the provider inserts a thin tube in the rectum to see the inside of the rectum and colon. The appointment will take several hours, but the test lasts only about 30 minutes. You may not remember having the test when you wake up. Your provider will discuss the meaning of the test results with you. If you received anesthesia, you must have someone to take you home after the test, whether by walking, subway, bus or car.

When? You have this test once every 10 years if you are at average risk for colon cancer.

Where? A health care provider does this test in a medical office or hospital.

Why? Colonoscopy detects and prevents colon and rectal cancers. If the test does find cancer, your provider may be able to remove it before it spreads.

How? You will have a special diet the day before the colonoscopy. This diet contains no solid food and only clear liquids (no dairy, pulp, or red or purple drinks). Your provider will prescribe a medicine (bowel preparation liquid) for you to drink, which will make you have frequent bowel movements. This cleans the colon before the test. You will need easy access to the bathroom. On the day of the test you will not eat or drink anything. The one exception may be drinking more of the bowel preparation liquid to clean your colon.

Does the Test Have Risks? A colonoscopy is generally safe and usually pain-free. It has a risk of rare complications, such as dehydration, cardiovascular events, infection, or colon perforation or bleeding. Discuss the risks and benefits with your provider.

Which Screening Test Is Right for You?

Differences in Colon Cancer Screening

Test Result

	Colon- oscopy	FIT*	HSgFOBT*	FIT-DNA*
Can detect colon cancer	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can prevent colon cancer	✓	*	*	*
Requires a follow-up test (colonoscopy) if results are abnormal	—	✓	✓	✓

Test Process

	Colon- oscopy	FIT*	HSgFOBT*	FIT-DNA*
You do this test at home	—	✓	✓	✓
Requires you to handle stool (feces)	—	✓	✓	✓
You do the test once a year	—	✓	✓	—
You do the test once every three years	—	—	—	✓
You do the test once every 10 years	✓	—	—	—
A health care provider does this test in a medical office or hospital	✓	—	—	—
Requires a special diet the day before	✓	—	—	—
May require diet restriction a few days before	—	—	✓	—
Usually includes anesthesia before	✓	—	—	—
Is a procedure to look inside the colon	✓	—	—	—
Includes a risk of rare complications, such as colon perforation or bleeding	✓	*	*	*
Requires an escort home	✓	—	—	—

*If this test shows abnormal results, further testing is needed by colonoscopy. If the follow-up colonoscopy detects abnormal growths or polyps, removing them can help prevent cancer.

Definitions:

FIT = fecal immunochemical test

HSgFOBT = high-sensitivity guaiac-based fecal occult blood test

FIT-DNA = multi-target stool DNA test

Where To Get a Colon Cancer Test: Talk to your health care provider to schedule a screening.

Payment: Most insurance plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, cover colon cancer screenings. However, coverage can vary. Check with your health care provider and insurer about coverage before your screening test. If you do not have insurance, you may be eligible to sign up for low- or no-cost coverage. You can call **311** to get free assistance with signing up for a plan.

New Yorkers without insurance may be eligible for low- or no-cost screening.

To learn more about colon cancer and screening options, visit nyc.gov/health and search for colon cancer.