If you are **45 to 50 years of age or older**, you should get screened for colon and rectal cancer, also called **colorectal cancer**. There are several screening tests, but the most important thing is to get screened. Screening can reduce deaths from this type of cancer by more than 50%. Talk with your doctor about which screening test may be best for you.

### About this cancer

Most colon and rectal cancer starts as an abnormal growth, called a polyp, in the colon or rectum. Not all polyps become cancer, but some polyps change into cancer over time.

Colorectal cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Having a screening test to detect polyps or signs of cancer allows early treatment.

### Risk factors

Certain things that you cannot change can increase your risk of getting colon and rectal cancer.

- Being age 50 or older, although more cases are occurring in younger people.
- African Americans have a higher rate of colon and rectal cancer compared to other racial groups.
- Having inflammatory bowel disease, such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease.
- Family members have had colon or rectal cancer or polyps, or inherited cancer syndromes.

If you have either of the last 2 factors, your risk may be even higher for this cancer.

There are some other risk factors that you can change:

- Being overweight
- Drinking alcohol
- Not being physically active
- Eating a diet that is high in red meats or processed meats
- Smoking or other tobacco use
Screening tests

For people with an average risk of colon and rectal cancer, there are visual and stool screening tests available. Each of the tests is covered by some, if not all insurance plans, including Medicare. Check with your insurance company what your coverage is.

Visual Tests

Visual tests allow your doctor to look inside your colon and rectum.

The colonoscopy is the visual screening test that most people have heard about.

- You need to be on a clear liquid diet and take medicine to clear your colon and rectum of stool for at least 1 day before this test.
- You may need to take 1 to 2 days off work to prepare and recover.
- You would be put to sleep, so you need to have someone to drive you home.
- The doctor uses a special camera to look in your colon and rectum and remove any polyps that may be present.

Most often, a colonoscopy is repeated every 5 to 10 years, depending on your risk.

Stool Tests

Stool tests can be done at home by collecting a stool sample and then mailing it to a lab for testing.

- These tests do not need any special diet or other prep before the test.
- You would not need to take time off to do these types of tests.
- If these tests are positive, a colonoscopy would be needed to check for polyps or cancer.

The fecal immunochemical test (FIT) checks for hidden blood in your stool from polyps or cancer.

- You get a kit in the mail, or you may be given a prescription to pick up a kit at the drug store to collect your sample at home.
- The kit has a container, brush or collection stick, and a vial or card for your sample.
- Follow the directions with your kit to be sure you use the kit correctly to get your results.

The FIT test is repeated each year.

The stool DNA (sDNA) test, also called a multitargeted stool DNA (MT-sDNA) test, looks for abnormal DNA from cancer or polyp cells and hidden blood in the stool.

- Cologuard is the only test of this type at this time.
- You get a kit in the mail to collect your sample at home. The kit contains everything you need, including detailed instructions.
- Mail the sample back as directed or the test may need to be done over.

The sDNA test is repeated every 3 years.

Talk about which screening is best for you

Talk to your doctor about any concerns you have about cancer screening and which screening test may be best for you.

Get screened, no matter which test you choose.