

# ***Choosing a Colon Cancer Screening Test***

**MARK'S DECISION**



## **Get checked for colon cancer!**

Colorectal cancer, also called colon cancer, is one of the leading causes of cancer-related death in New York City. Regular screening can help prevent this kind of cancer or find it earlier when it is easier to treat.

Colon cancer cases have been increasing among people younger than age 50. People without risk factors should start screening at age 45. If you have risk factors, such as a close family member with colon cancer, you may need to start screening earlier or get screened more often.

Discuss your personal risk with your health care provider to determine how early and how often you should be screened. It is better to know about your risks sooner rather than later. Having risk factors does not necessarily mean you will develop colon cancer, and having no risk factors does not mean you will not get the disease.

There are different colon cancer screening tests. Stool-based tests can detect blood or changes in genes (DNA), which can be signs of colon cancer, from a stool (feces) sample. Screening test options include:

- A fecal immunochemical test (FIT), which detects blood. A FIT is recommended every year.
- A high-sensitivity guaiac-based fecal occult blood test (HSgFOBT), which detects blood. An HSgFOBT is recommended every year.
- A multi-target stool DNA test (FIT-DNA), which detects blood and changes in genes (DNA) that could be signs of cancer. A FIT-DNA is recommended once every three years.
- A colonoscopy. This is a visual exam with a special camera that allows a health care provider to directly observe your colon and, during the same exam, remove any polyps found. A colonoscopy is done once every 10 years or

sometimes more frequently, depending on your personal risk and what the exam shows. A positive stool-based test must be followed up with a colonoscopy.

For more information, visit [nyc.gov/health/coloncancer](http://nyc.gov/health/coloncancer). For a detailed video about getting ready for a colonoscopy, visit [bit.ly/colonoscopy-prep-video](http://bit.ly/colonoscopy-prep-video).

### **Talk to your health care provider and your family.**

This graphic novella was created to help you start the conversation with your provider and your family about screening options for colon cancer prevention. Mark is helping himself and his family members prevent colon cancer, and you can help yourself and your family too. By reading this family story, you will learn:

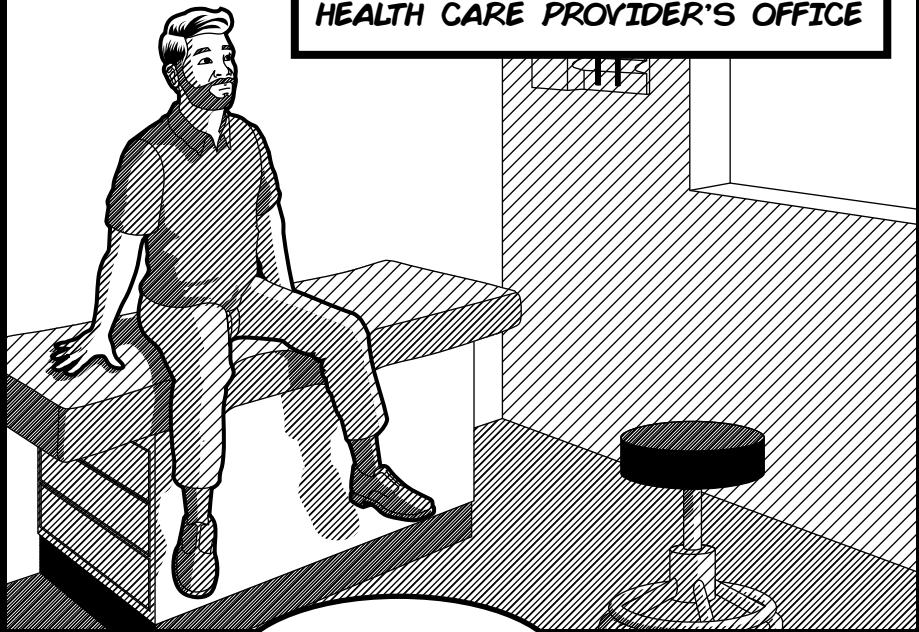
- How to discuss colon cancer screening and prevention with your provider
- What to expect for stool-based tests and a colonoscopy

Discuss your personal risk, screening method and frequency of screening with your provider and your family.

### **Recognize possible colon cancer symptoms.**

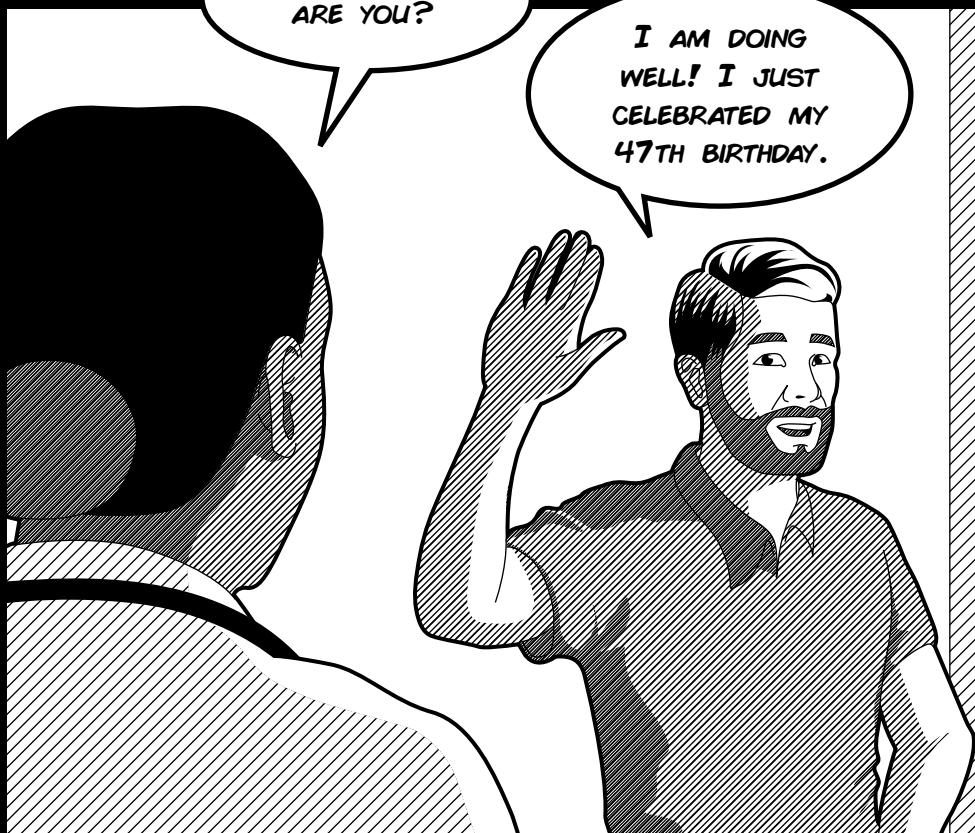
Blood in your stool is one possible sign of colon cancer. Colon cancer can cause belly or rectal pain that will not go away, or constipation or diarrhea that does not get better. Unintended weight loss is another possible sign. These symptoms can also be caused by health issues other than colon cancer, but it is very important to see a health care provider if you have these symptoms.

## HEALTH CARE PROVIDER'S OFFICE



HI MARK! HOW  
ARE YOU?

I AM DOING  
WELL! I JUST  
CELEBRATED MY  
47TH BIRTHDAY.



OH, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!  
HAVE YOU BEEN  
SCREENED FOR COLON  
CANCER YET?

No.

BUT I REMEMBER  
MY WIFE SANDRA'S  
COLONOSCOPY  
EXPERIENCE.



WELL, IT IS TIME TO  
GET CHECKED. COLON CANCER  
SCREENING CHECKS FOR COLON  
OR RECTAL CANCER, AND FOR  
POLYPS THAT COULD LEAD  
TO CANCER.

REMOVING THOSE  
POLYPS CAN ACTUALLY  
PREVENT CANCER!

ALL RIGHT.  
SHOULD WE SCHEDULE  
A COLONOSCOPY  
SOON, THEN?

A COLONOSCOPY IS ONE OF  
THE SCREENING METHODS. IT DIRECTLY  
OBSERVES THE COLON AND RECTUM,  
AND HELPS US REMOVE POLYPS AND  
ANYTHING ELSE THAT CAN DEVELOP  
INTO CANCER.

I SEE. WHAT ARE  
THE OTHER SCREENING METHODS  
OR TESTS THAT I CAN DO?

ANOTHER OPTION IS A  
STOOL-BASED TEST CALLED FIT.  
YOU MAIL A SMALL STOOL, OR  
FECES, SAMPLE FROM HOME. THE  
LAB THEN TESTS IT FOR BLOOD,  
WHICH COULD BE A SIGN  
OF CANCER.

YOU CAN  
MAIL FECES?

YOU CAN!  
STOOL-BASED TESTS CAN  
BE A GREAT OPTION FOR  
PEOPLE AT AVERAGE RISK  
FOR COLON CANCER.

WHICH TEST  
IS BETTER?

IT DEPENDS. BOTH  
ARE EFFECTIVE AT FINDING  
CANCER AND PROVEN TO  
SAVE LIVES. THE FIT IS  
EASIER TO DO, BUT YOU  
WILL HAVE TO DO IT  
EVERY YEAR.

THE COLONOSCOPY  
REQUIRES MORE  
PREPARATION AND  
ANESTHESIA, BUT MOST  
PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO DO  
IT AS OFTEN. WE CAN ALSO  
REMOVE POLYPUS DURING  
THE COLONOSCOPY.

WILL MY  
INSURANCE COVER  
ANY OF THESE  
TESTS?

BOTH THE  
STOOL-BASED TESTS  
AND COLONOSCOPY ARE  
COVERED BY ALMOST ALL  
INSURANCE PLANS.\*

I KNOW SANDRA HAD  
TO HAVE A SPECIAL DIET AND  
MEDICATION THE DAY BEFORE  
HER COLONOSCOPY. I AM  
NOT SURE IF I AM READY  
FOR THAT YET. CAN I DO  
THE FIT TEST FIRST?

\*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 for low- or no-cost coverage. Call **311** for free enrollment assistance.

**YOU CAN!**  
**A FEW QUESTIONS: DO YOU HAVE**  
**ANY CLOSE FAMILY WITH COLON**  
**CANCER OR POLYPS, OR GENETIC**  
**CONDITIONS SUCH AS LYNCH**  
**SYNDROME?**



**EXCELLENT.**  
**I WILL ASK THE NURSE TO**  
**GET A FIT TEST FOR YOU**  
**TO TAKE HOME. THE NURSE**  
**WILL EXPLAIN HOW TO USE**  
**IT.**



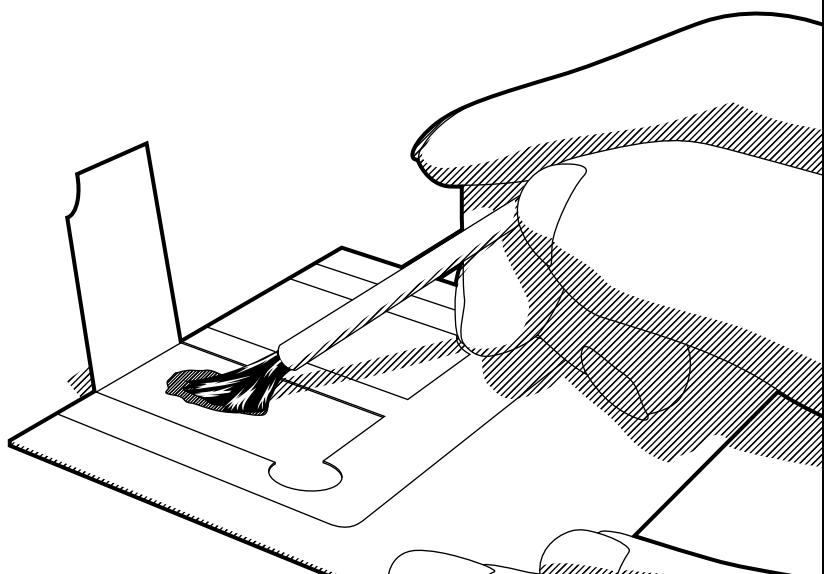
HI MARK.  
NICE TO MEET  
YOU!

HERE IS THE FIT TEST FOR YOU.  
IT IS VERY EASY. ALL YOU HAVE TO  
DO IS USE THIS STICK TO PICK UP A  
SMALL AMOUNT OF STOOL, PLACE IT  
ON THE LABELED PORTION OF THE TEST  
CARD, THEN SEAL IT UP AND MAIL IT  
OUT. YOU WILL DO THIS TEST ONCE  
EVERY YEAR.

DO YOU HAVE  
ANY QUESTIONS?

I THINK  
I GOT IT.  
THANKS!

LATER THAT DAY



You may receive a stool-based test kit that looks different. Please follow the instructions from your health care provider.



**YEAR ONE**



**YEAR TWO**



January 13, 2020

Mark Donald  
122 Eighth Avenue  
Queens, NY 11101

**NORMAL**

Dear MR. MARK DONALD,  
Your FIT test came back negative and normal. Please continue to take and send your FIT test every year to ensure proper screening and early detection if the test comes back positive or abnormal. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Thank you.  
Sincerely,

  
Dr. Janel Clark

**NORMAL**

January 13, 2021

Mark Donald  
122 Eighth Avenue  
Queens, NY 11101

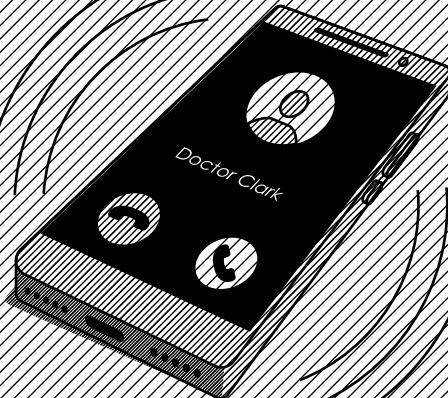
Dear MR. MARK DONALD,

Your FIT test came back negative and normal. Please continue to take and send your FIT test every year to ensure proper screening and early detection if the test comes back positive or abnormal. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Thank you.  
Sincerely,

  
Dr. Janel Clark

YEAR THREE



HI DOCTOR CLARK.

WAIT, MY FIT  
IS ABNORMAL?



TRY NOT TO BE TOO WORRIED, MARK.  
AN ABNORMAL FIT RESULT DOES NOT  
NECESSARILY MEAN YOU HAVE COLON CANCER,  
BUT YOU WILL NEED TO HAVE A  
COLONOSCOPY JUST TO BE SURE.



I AM STILL REALLY  
NERVOUS. I SHOULD  
TALK TO SANDRA ABOUT  
HER COLONOSCOPY  
EXPERIENCE - MAYBE  
THAT WOULD HELP.

A COLONOSCOPY IS NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO THE BOWEL PREPARATION.

YOU HAVE A CLEAR LIQUID DIET THE DAY BEFORE, RIGHT?

YES, AND REMEMBER TO FINISH DRINKING ALL THE SPECIAL BOWEL PREP SOLUTION THE DOCTOR PRESCRIBED YOU, AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY.

YOU WANT YOUR COLON TO BE CLEAN SO THE DOCTOR CAN SEE EVERYTHING. AND OF COURSE, I WILL TAKE YOU HOME AFTER THE COLONOSCOPY.

THANKS FOR ALWAYS BEING SUPPORTIVE.

## THE DAY BEFORE MARK'S COLONOSCOPY



## DAY OF COLONOSCOPY



ARE YOU OK?

JUST A LITTLE  
NERVOUS. IS IT  
GOING TO BE  
UNCOMFORTABLE?

HONESTLY,  
I DO NOT EVEN REMEMBER  
THE COLONOSCOPY PART,  
ONLY THE PREP. YOU WILL  
BE OK.

HI MARK! GLAD YOU  
MADE IT. ARE YOU READY  
FOR YOUR COLONOSCOPY?

YES. I HAD ONLY  
CLEAR LIQUIDS YESTERDAY.  
I ALSO FINISHED ALL THE  
BOWEL PREP SOLUTION  
AND DID NOT EAT  
ANYTHING TODAY.

GREAT! THIS  
SHOULD GIVE THE  
DOCTOR A CLEAR VIEW  
OF YOUR COLON AND  
RECTUM.

THE DOCTOR INSERTS  
A SMALL TUBE THAT IS  
ABOUT ONE-HALF INCH  
IN DIAMETER INTO YOUR  
RECTUM. THE TUBE HAS A  
LIGHT AND CAMERA AT THE  
END OF IT. IT SHOULD  
NOT HURT.



THANKS. I THINK I  
AM READY TO GO  
IN NOW.

GREAT. LET'S HEAD  
TO THE PROCEDURE  
ROOM, THEN.

I AM SO GLAD THAT MARK  
IS TAKING CARE OF HIS  
HEALTH!

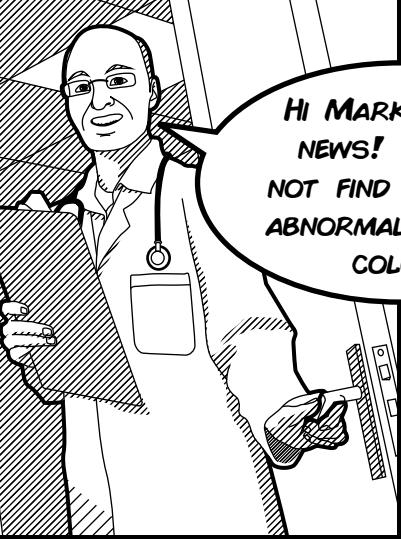


I HEARD YOU  
DID A GOOD JOB ON THE  
BOWEL PREP. WE SHOULD  
SEE YOUR CLEAN COLON  
HERE LATER.

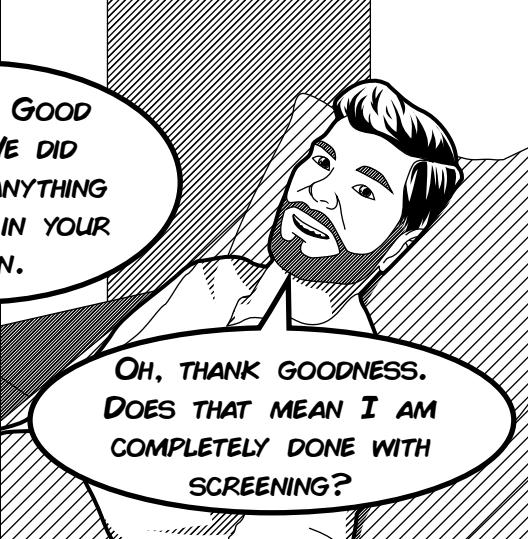
I AM GOING TO  
GIVE YOU MEDICATION  
TO RELAX. IT WILL  
MAKE YOU SLEEPY. ARE  
YOU READY FOR THE  
PROCEDURE?

I AM READY.

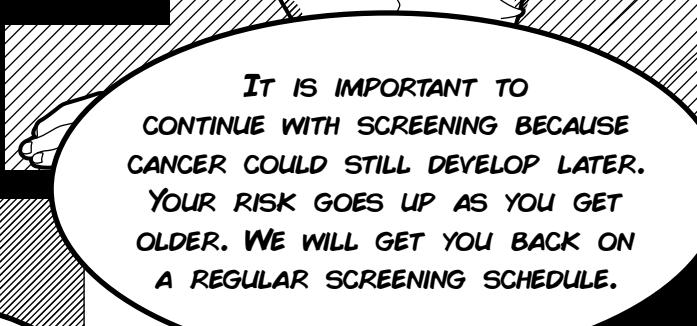
## AFTER THE SCREENING



HI MARK. GOOD NEWS! WE DID NOT FIND ANYTHING ABNORMAL IN YOUR COLON.



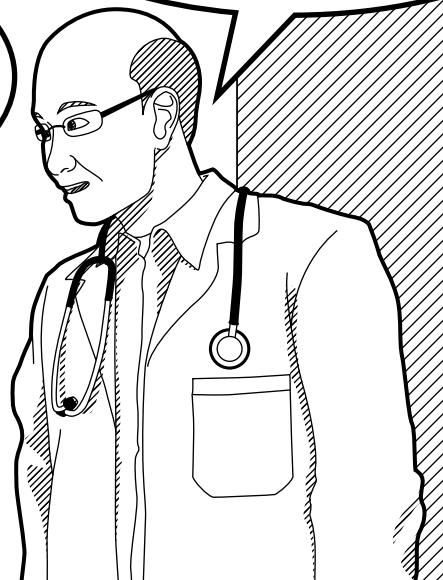
OH, THANK GOODNESS. DOES THAT MEAN I AM COMPLETELY DONE WITH SCREENING?



IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE WITH SCREENING BECAUSE CANCER COULD STILL DEVELOP LATER. YOUR RISK GOES UP AS YOU GET OLDER. WE WILL GET YOU BACK ON A REGULAR SCREENING SCHEDULE.



WHAT A RELIEF.  
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO  
TO LOWER MY RISK  
OF COLON CANCER?





MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES.  
RESEARCH SHOWS SOME  
BEHAVIORS SEEM TO BE CONNECTED  
TO LOWER COLON CANCER RISK.  
WE DO NOT ALWAYS KNOW WHY  
SOME PEOPLE GET CANCER AND  
SOME DO NOT.

PEOPLE WHO EAT FEWER  
PROCESSED MEATS ARE LESS  
LIKELY TO GET COLON CANCER.  
BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE ALSO  
SEEMS TO BE CONNECTED TO  
LOWER RISK.



PROCESSED MEATS  
INCLUDE DELI MEATS,  
BACON AND HOT DOGS,  
RIGHT?

THAT IS  
CORRECT.

HOW ABOUT  
DRINKING AND  
SMOKING?

MORE THAN TWO DRINKS  
PER DAY HAS BEEN CONNECTED  
TO COLON CANCER. SMOKING HAS  
BEEN TOO. SO, LOWER THE AMOUNT  
OF ALCOHOL YOU DRINK AND HOW  
OFTEN, AND DO NOT SMOKE.

GENERALLY,  
HEALTHY CHOICES THROUGHOUT  
LIFE MAY LOWER YOUR RISK  
FOR COLON CANCER.

ALL RIGHT,  
DOCTOR. I WILL  
TRY. THANKS.

I JUST NEED TO KEEP  
UP WITH SCREENING AND  
A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE  
TO LOWER MY RISK OF  
GETTING COLON CANCER.

HOW?





MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER SUGGESTS THAT I EAT HEALTHIER AND HAVE FEWER PROCESSED MEATS. I SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE, DRINK LESS ALCOHOL AND NOT SMOKE. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO HAVE MY NEXT SCREENING ON TIME.

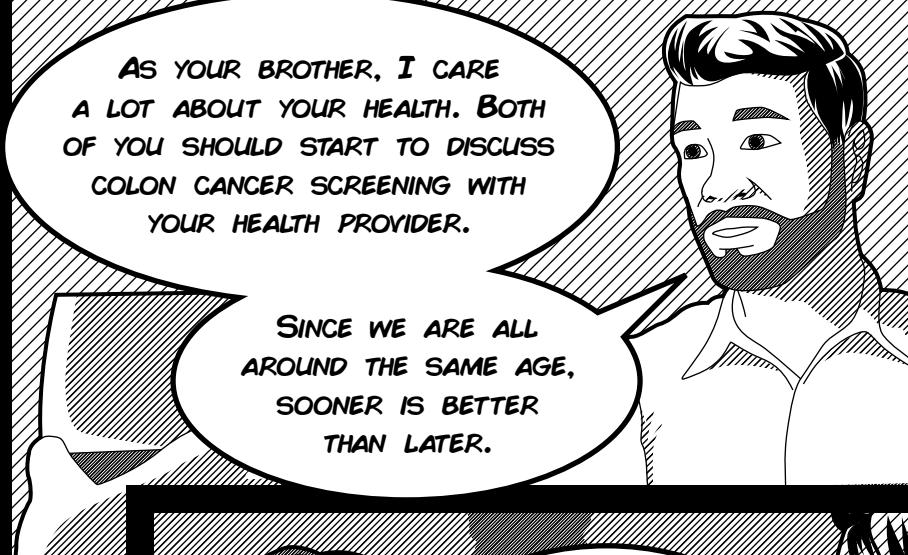
WE WILL ADOPT THESE CHANGES TOGETHER! MARK, YOU WILL NOT BE ALONE.



YOU ARE THE BEST!

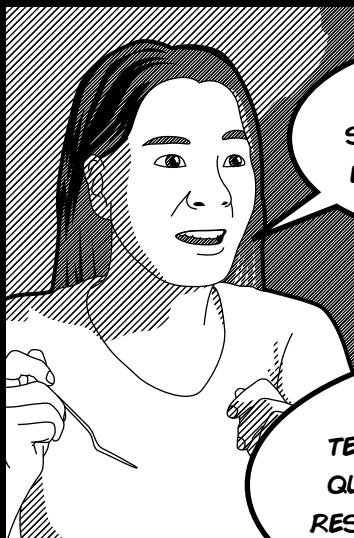
LATER THAT NIGHT, OUT AT DINNER WITH THE FAMILY





AS YOUR BROTHER, I CARE  
A LOT ABOUT YOUR HEALTH. BOTH  
OF YOU SHOULD START TO DISCUSS  
COLON CANCER SCREENING WITH  
YOUR HEALTH PROVIDER.

SINCE WE ARE ALL  
AROUND THE SAME AGE,  
SOONER IS BETTER  
THAN LATER.

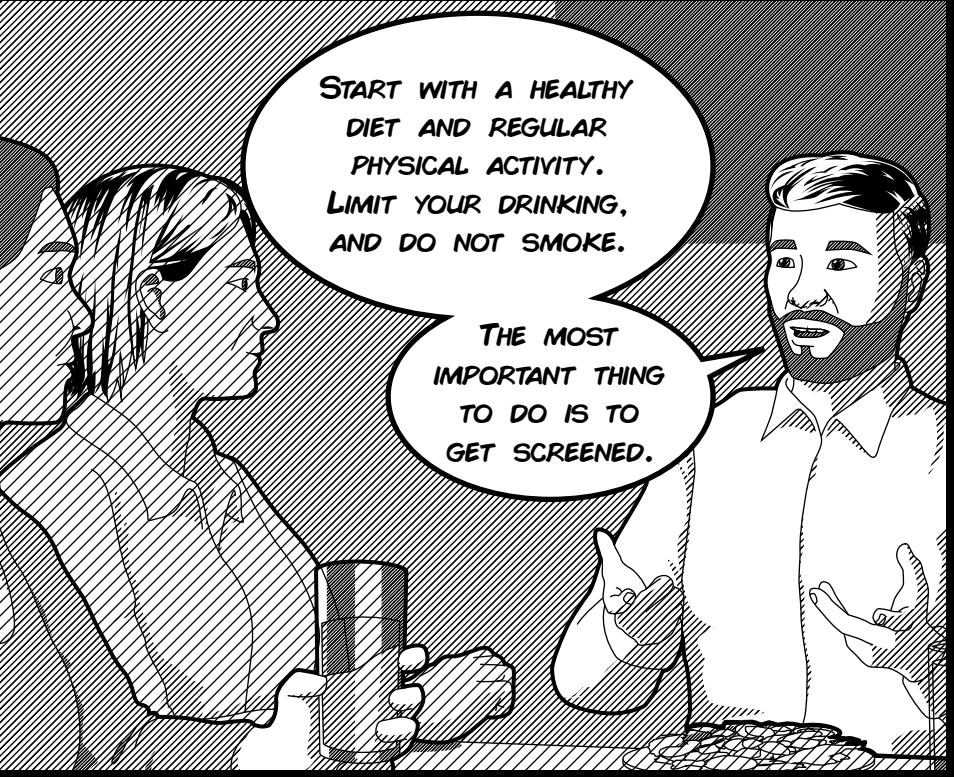


WHAT  
SCREENING TEST  
DID YOU TAKE?

I DID THE STOOL-BASED  
TEST FOR THREE YEARS. IT WAS  
QUICK AND EASY. THIS YEAR MY  
RESULT WAS ABNORMAL, SO I HAD  
A FOLLOW-UP COLONOSCOPY.



WHAT IS THE HEALTH  
CARE PROVIDER'S  
ADVICE ABOUT HEALTHY  
LIVING?



START WITH A HEALTHY  
DIET AND REGULAR  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.  
LIMIT YOUR DRINKING,  
AND DO NOT SMOKE.

THE MOST  
IMPORTANT THING  
TO DO IS TO  
GET SCREENED.



I DO NOT WANT TO GET  
CANCER! I WILL TRY TO  
QUIT SMOKING.

ANDREW, REMEMBER  
TO GET A COLON  
CANCER SCREENING TEST  
WHEN YOUR PROVIDER  
RECOMMENDS IT.

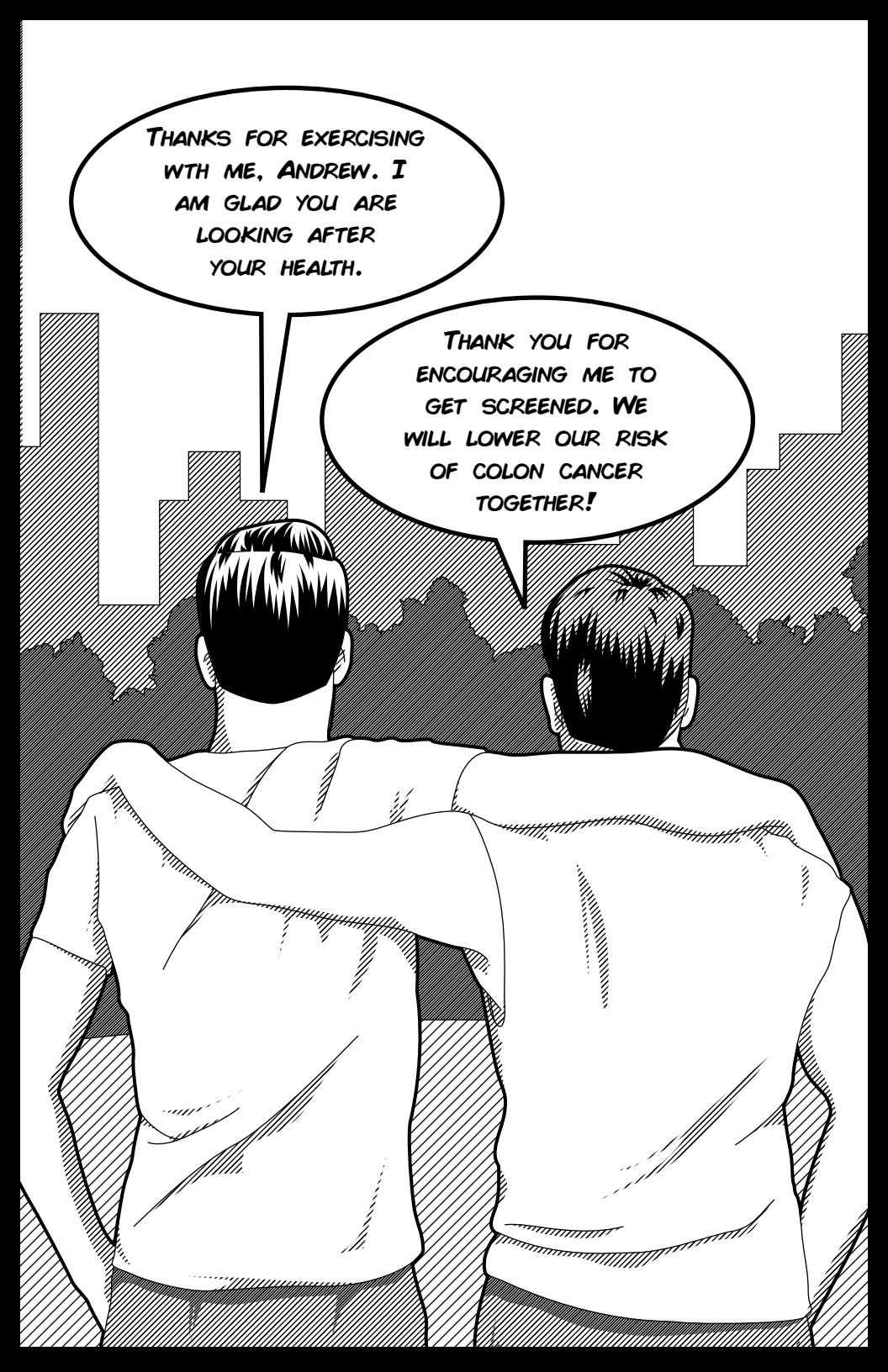
I WILL, DAD.

LET'S STOP  
AHEAD AND TAKE A  
QUICK BREAK.

HEY LILY.  
DO YOU WANT  
A SNACK?

YEAH!





THANKS FOR EXERCISING  
WITH ME, ANDREW. I  
AM GLAD YOU ARE  
LOOKING AFTER  
YOUR HEALTH.

THANK YOU FOR  
ENCOURAGING ME TO  
GET SCREENED. WE  
WILL LOWER OUR RISK  
OF COLON CANCER  
TOGETHER!

## Facts About Colon Cancer Risk

### Risk factors for colon cancer include:

- Being older — about 90% of cases occur in people age 50 and older\*
- Having a personal or family history of colon cancer or adenomatous polyps
- Having an inherited syndrome such as Lynch syndrome or familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)

### These lifestyle changes may lower your risk of colon cancer:

- Lowering your weight if you have overweight or obesity
- Increasing your physical activity by sitting less and moving more
- Eating fewer processed meats and more fruits and vegetables
- Drinking fewer alcoholic drinks
- Reducing or stopping tobacco use. For support to quit smoking or vaping, call 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487).

Talk to your health care provider today about your risks and screening for colon cancer.

To learn more, visit **nyc.gov/health/coloncancer**. For related stories about screening, click on **Sandra's Story** and **How To Do an At-Home Colon Cancer Test**.

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\*People without risk factors should start screening at age 45, as colon cancer cases have been increasing among people younger than age 50. People with risk factors may need to start screening even earlier.



