

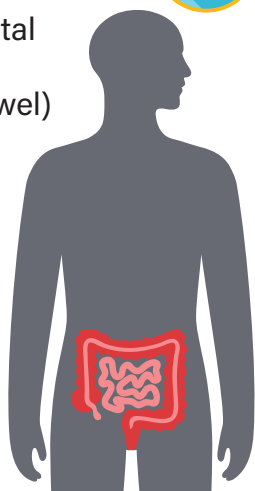


Why You Should Get Screened for Colon Cancer

What is colon cancer?



Colon cancer (also known as colorectal cancer) is cancer that starts in the colon (the large intestine or large bowel) or rectum. It often starts with small bumps or growths called polyps that grow slowly for years. Most polyps are not cancerous, but some can turn into cancer. Once a polyp becomes cancerous, it can take more time for the cancer to start causing health issues. By the time you notice symptoms, the cancer is usually harder to treat or cure.



What is colon cancer screening?



Colon cancer screening is a way to check the health of your colon, even before you have symptoms. It is a way to protect yourself from colon cancer and may save your life.

Screening for colon cancer has two goals:

1. Find and remove polyps before they turn into cancer.
2. Find cancer when it is still small or early-stage so you have a better chance of a cure.

Who should get screened for colon cancer?



Anyone can get colon cancer, so colon cancer screening is for **everyone**.

When should I start getting screened?



Most people should get screened for the first time at age 45 and continue screening through at least age 75. People with an increased chance of getting colon cancer may need to start screening before age 45.

To find out when to start screening, talk to your health care provider about your **risk factors** for colon cancer.

Risk factors for colon cancer increase a person's chance of getting colon cancer. Risk factors that can affect when and how often to get screened include:

- Colon cancer or polyps in yourself or a family member
- Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease
- An inherited syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis or Lynch syndrome
- Cystic fibrosis
- Treatment for any cancer before age 40

Type 2 diabetes, alcohol use, and tobacco use are also risk factors for colon cancer.





How often should I get screened?



How often to get screened for colon cancer depends on which screening test you use:

- A **colonoscopy** needs to be done every 10 years. If you have risk factors, ask your provider if you need a colonoscopy more often.
- A **stool-based test** needs to be done every one to three years, depending on the type of test you do.

Which screening test should I have?



Colonoscopy and stool-based tests are the most common screening tests. Your provider may also offer others. Talk to your provider about which test is best for you:

- **Colonoscopy:** You will be given medicine to make you sleep (sedation). Then, a provider uses a tube with a small camera at one end to look inside your colon, check for cancer, and detect and remove polyps. You will need to follow a liquid diet and take medicine to clean out your colon before a colonoscopy.

- **Stool-based tests:** You use a special kit to take a sample of your stool at home and then return the kit for testing. If your results are not normal, you will need to follow up with a colonoscopy. Stool-based tests are an option for people who are not at high risk of colon cancer.

No matter how you get screened, make sure to get your results. If your results are not normal, follow your provider's instructions for what to do next.

Does health insurance cover screening?



Most health insurance plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, cover colon cancer screening. For many people, there will be no out-of-pocket cost.



What if I do not have health insurance?



For help finding health insurance coverage, visit nyc.gov/healthcoverage or call **311**.

For help finding free or low-cost colon cancer screening:

- Call **311** to be connected to an NYC Health + Hospitals location.
- Call the New York State Cancer Services Program at 866-442-CANCER (866-442-2262) or visit health.ny.gov/diseases/cancer/services.

What else can I do to protect myself from colon cancer?



Here are some things you can do to help keep your colon healthy:

- Be physically active.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Eat less processed and red meat (such as deli meats, smoked meats, sausage, and bacon).
- Drink less alcohol.
- If you smoke, try to quit.
 - Visit nyc.gov/nycquits for help quitting, cutting back, or staying smoke-free when you want to.





What are the symptoms of colon cancer?



See your provider if you have any of these symptoms. Do not wait until your next screening.

These symptoms do not always mean you have cancer. Your provider can help you figure out what is wrong. If it does turn out to be cancer, starting treatment will give you the best chance of getting better.

- Blood in your stool (feces) or in the toilet after a bowel movement
- Stool that looks dark red or black
- Diarrhea or constipation that does not go away
- A change in the shape of your stool
- A feeling that your bowel does not empty completely
- Pain in your belly that keeps coming back or does not go away
- Loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss
- Feeling unusually tired or weak



For more information, visit
nyc.gov/health/coloncancer.

