

## What is colon cancer?

Colon cancer is cancer of the large intestine and rectum. Usually there are no symptoms of colon cancer until the cancer has spread. That's why screening is important. Screening has been shown to help prevent colon cancer and decrease colon cancer deaths.

## What are the goals of screening?

The goals of screening for colon cancer are:

- Help prevent cancer
- Treat any cancer before it spreads
- Lower your risk of needing surgery
- Lower your risk of dying from colon cancer

## When should I be screened?

Kaiser Permanente recommends that starting at age 45, you do ONE of the following to screen for colon cancer:

- Have a stool test every year.
- Have a colonoscopy every 10 years.

These recommendations are based on the current evidence available regarding colon cancer screening

## How are the tests performed?

The stool test, called a FIT kit, looks for small amounts of blood in your stool. You can do the stool test in the privacy of your home and only one sample is needed. Your doctor will give you a stool test kit to take home with instructions about how to collect a stool sample.

A colonoscopy is an exam of the inner lining of the rectum and entire colon to check for colon cancer and polyps. The test uses a flexible, lighted tube that is about as wide as your finger to see your colon.

## What if the screening test is positive?

If the stool test result is positive, we will recommend a colonoscopy.

Having a positive stool test does not mean you have cancer. There are many reasons why you can have blood in your stool, and cancer is only one of them. Most people with a positive test do not have cancer or pre-cancerous polyps.

If a polyp or growth is found during the colonoscopy, it will either be removed or a small tissue sample (biopsy) will be taken.

Depending on how the sample looks under the microscope, your doctor will decide what follow-up is needed

## What are the risks of colonoscopy?

There is a small risk of a serious complication during or after a colonoscopy. Complications might include bleeding (especially after a biopsy or removal of a polyp) and damage to the colon.

The tests used for screening do not find all polyps and cancers. Colonoscopy finds the most polyps, but it also has the highest risk of complications. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about the risks of being tested.

## What are the risk factors for colon cancer?

If you have any of the following risk factors, talk to your doctor about starting screening before age 45:

- Ulcerative colitis.
- Crohn's disease.
- A family member who had colon cancer or a pre-cancerous polyp in the colon.
- Polyps in your colon or rectum.
- Blood in the stool can be an early sign of cancer or other problems in the colon.

## How can I reduce my risk of colon cancer?

There isn't enough evidence to recommend changes in diet, such as eating foods high in fiber or avoiding red meat, or limiting alcohol use to prevent colon cancer.

The following things will lead to a healthier lifestyle and reduce your overall risk of cancer:

- Be active - get 30 minutes or more of physical activity on most days of the week.
- Eat a diet that is low in saturated fat and high in fruits and vegetables.
- Don't smoke.

## Resources: Where can I get help?

- The Kaiser Permanente Resource Line can provide information on a variety of health topics including nutrition and exercise. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. toll-free 1-800-992-2279.
- Visit the Kaiser Permanente website at [kp.org/wa](https://kp.org/wa) for more information on various health topics.
- The Kaiser Permanente Consulting Nurse Service is available to Kaiser Permanente members with medical questions or concerns. Call 24 hours a day, toll-free 1-800-297-6877.
- The Quit For Life® Program can help you quit tobacco. For more information or to register call 1-800-462-5327.

# Colon Cancer Screening

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The importance of early detection

Coverage may vary by plan. For benefits refer to your coverage agreement or contact Member Services at 1-888-901-4636.