

Types of Screening Tests

There are several different screening tests that can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer. Each one can be used alone.

Sometimes they are used in combination with each other. Talk to your doctor about which test or tests are right for you and how often you should be tested.

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test or Stool Test**

For this test, you receive a test kit from your doctor or health care provider. At home, you put a small piece of stool on a test card. You do this for three bowel movements in a row. Then you return the test cards to the doctor or a lab. The stool samples are checked for blood.

How Often: This test should be done every year.

- **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy**

For this test, the doctor puts a short, thin, flexible, lighted tube into your rectum. The doctor checks for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and lower third of the colon.

How Often: This test should be done every 5 years.

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test Plus Flexible Sigmoidoscopy**

Your doctor may ask you to have both tests. Some experts believe that by using both tests, there is a better chance of finding polyps or colorectal cancer.

- **Colonoscopy**

This test is similar to flexible sigmoidoscopy, except the doctor uses a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube to check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the entire colon. During the test, the doctor can find and remove most polyps and some cancers.

How Often: This test should be done every 10 years.

Colonoscopy may also be used as a follow-up test if anything unusual is found during one of the other screening tests.

- **Double Contrast Barium Enema**

This test is an x-ray of your colon. You are given an enema with a liquid called barium. Then the doctor takes an x-ray. The barium makes it easy for the doctor to see the outline of your colon on the x-ray to check for polyps or other abnormalities.

How Often: This test should be done every 5 years.

Will Insurance or Medicare Pay for Screening Tests?

Many insurance plans and Medicare help pay for colorectal cancer screening tests. Check with your plan to find out which tests are covered for you.

To find out about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

The Bottom Line

If you're 50 or older, talk with your doctor about getting screened.

For more information, visit

www.cdc.gov/screenforlife or call CDC Info at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

For TTY, call 1-888-232-6348.

