

# Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#60 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

# Get Checked!

## 50 or Older?

### Get a Colonoscopy to Prevent Colon Cancer



## Colonoscopy tests for – and can also prevent – colon cancer

- Colonoscopy detects more than 95% of early colon cancer.
- Colonoscopy is the only test that can also prevent cancer.
- This is because the doctor can remove polyps – small growths that may develop into cancer if left alone – before they turn into cancer.
- Other colon cancer screening tests do not examine the colon as thoroughly or remove polyps.
- Colonoscopy examines the entire colon.
  - It uses a flexible tube with a camera at one end.
  - It generally lasts about 30 minutes.
- Colonoscopy is safe and usually painless.
  - There may be some discomfort, but patients are usually given a sedative to help them relax.
  - The risk of complications is very small.
- Colonoscopy is usually needed only once every 10 years if test results are normal. Other screening tests are needed more often.



## Risk factors for colon cancer

**Colon cancer is one of the most preventable – but least prevented – of all cancers.**

### Biggest Risk Factors

- **Being 50 or older.** More than 90% of colon cancers occur in this age group.
- **Having a personal or family history of colon cancer.**
  - If you have had colon polyps, colon cancer or some other cancers – or have a parent, brother or sister who has – this raises your risk.

- People with a personal or family history may have to be tested before age 50. Talk to your doctor.

## Other Risk Factors

- **Smoking.** Quitting smoking reduces your risk.
- **Being overweight or obese.**
- **Ethnic background.** Having an African-American or Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jewish ancestry.
- **Having other colon diseases.** Ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease may increase your risk of developing colon cancer.



## Other colon cancer tests

**There are other colon cancer screening tests. Any test is better than no test at all. A positive result on any of these tests must be followed by colonoscopy.**

### Tests that check for hidden blood

#### Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) and Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)

- Both check for hidden blood in the stool.
- There is more than one kind of FOBT. Ask your doctor for a “high-sensitivity” test.
- Both FOBT and FIT include instructions on how to take stool samples at home and return them for testing.
- They should be done every year.

### Other Tests

#### Sigmoidoscopy

- Similar to colonoscopy but because it examines less than half of the colon (not the entire colon as colonoscopy does), it can miss some cancer.
- Some preparation is necessary to empty the colon.
- Should be done every 5 years

## Barium Enema X-Ray

- A chalky liquid is injected into your bowel. Then a series of X-rays is taken.
- Should be done every 5 years.

## Virtual Colonoscopy

- Uses X-rays and computers to produce images of the colon.
- Requires the same preparation to empty the colon as colonoscopy.
- No sedatives are required.
- May not find all abnormalities.
- May not be covered by your insurance.

## How to lower your risk

- **Don't smoke.** For free help quitting, call 311.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Exercise regularly.**  
Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 5 days a week.
- **Eat a healthy diet.**

## Get checked!

- Ask your regular doctor about colonoscopy.
- If your doctor does not recommend colonoscopy, people 50 or older should ask why.
- Colonoscopy is covered by most insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid.
- If you don't have insurance or a regular doctor, call 311 and ask for **Colonoscopy**.



# Colonoscopy Countdown

## How to Prepare and What to Expect

<b>7 days before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your doctor will probably ask you to stop taking aspirin, aspirin substitutes (such as ibuprofen) and iron medications.</li><li>• Your doctor may also tell you to stop taking some prescription medicines.</li></ul>
<b>6, 5, 4, 3, 2 days before</b>	You can eat a regular diet.
<b>1 day before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume only clear liquids (water, apple juice, coffee or tea without milk or cream, clear broth).</li><li>• Your doctor will also ask you to take medicine to empty your colon.</li><li>• This may be uncomfortable, but is necessary so the camera can see any cancer or polyp.</li></ul>
<b>A few hours later</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most people feel better after the sedative has worn off.</li><li>• An adult should accompany you home.</li><li>• Many people plan to relax the rest of the day.</li><li>• Most people can begin eating regular meals right away.</li></ul>
<b>A few hours later</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You should feel better and be able to resume all normal activities within a day.</li></ul>

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## More Information and Help

- **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or call 311 and ask for Colonoscopy
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/sfl/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/sfl/)
- **National Cancer Institute:** [www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal)
- **Mayo Clinic:** [www.mayoclinic.com/health/colon-cancer/CO99999](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/colon-cancer/CO99999)
- **National Institutes of Health:** <http://health.nih.gov/>

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