



# Colorectal cancer: A screening could save your life

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As one of the top three leading causes of cancer-related deaths in the U.S., colorectal cancer is highly common. Fortunately, it's also highly preventable. There are several tests that can detect precancerous changes before symptoms even start. Let's take a closer look at your options and how to make sure you're taking the right preventive steps.

## First things first, know your risk

Anyone can get colorectal cancer. While some risks are inherited, others are avoidable.

### You may be at higher risk if you:

- Have growths called polyps in the colon or rectum, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, ovarian disease, or type 2 diabetes.
- Have a family history of colon, rectal, or other types of cancer.

### You can reduce your risk by avoiding:

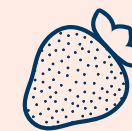
- Smoking cigarettes.
- Drinking three or more alcoholic drinks a day.
- Weight gain that results in having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater.

## When to connect with your doctor

You should have your first screening when you turn 45, but you may need one earlier if you're at higher risk or are having symptoms. In either case, make an appointment with your doctor ASAP to discuss your options. They'll recommend a screening based on your:



**Medical history** – This includes your personal and family health history as well as any symptoms you've had (changes in bowel habits, blood in stool, abdominal pain, etc.).



**Risk factors** – Your diet, lifestyle habits, and BMI all affect your risk. Age and ethnicity also have an impact.



**Preferences** – Your doctor will work with you to find an option that you're comfortable with.



## Your guide to common screenings

### Colonoscopy

Once sedated, your doctor will use a thin, flexible tube to view your colon for polyps and abnormal tissue.

**Recommended every 10 years.**

### Fecal occult blood tests (FOBT)

A sample of your stool will be tested for the presence of blood.

**Recommended once a year.**

### Flexible sigmoidoscopy

Once sedated, your doctor will insert a tube to look for abnormalities in the rectum and lower colon.

**Recommended every 5 years.**

### CT Colonography (Virtual colonoscopy)

Your doctor will use X-rays and computer imaging to search for abnormal cells in your colon.

**Recommended every 5 years.**

### Cologuard® fit DNA

A large sample of your stool will be tested for DNA changes.

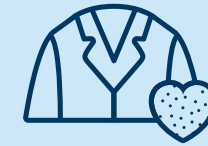
**Recommended every 3 years.**

## Consider getting a colonoscopy first

While everyone's health plan is a little different, preventive colonoscopies are usually fully covered. But if you opt for a different screening and have abnormal results, your doctor may order a diagnostic colonoscopy, which can come with out-of-pocket costs.\* That's why it's a good idea to start with a colonoscopy as your first screening, as long as your doctor recommends it.

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\*If you're 45 or older, a diagnostic colonoscopy performed within a year of a positive noninvasive colon cancer screening is covered under Preventive.



## After your screening

If you have a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy, your doctor will provide instructions for managing your diet, activity level, and potential side effects after the procedure. You'll also need a ride home, so make sure to let a friend or family member know when to pick you up.



## Understanding your results

**Normal** — No signs of precancerous polyps or cancer.

**Abnormal** — Presence of polyps or signs of cancer. More tests are needed, which may include:

- Diagnostic colonoscopy — To reexamine any abnormalities.
- Polypectomy — To remove any polyps found.
- Biopsy — To test a tissue sample for cancer.
- Imaging (CT scan or MRI) — To get more detailed images of your colon.

## What happens next

If **no cancer is detected**, your doctor will recommend follow-up screenings based on your age and risk factors.

If **you're diagnosed with cancer**, your care team will develop a treatment plan for your specific needs. We understand that getting a diagnosis is never easy — but you're not alone. We're here to connect you to the resources and support you need.



## Schedule your screening today

Call your doctor so you can set up a time to discuss your screening options. If you need help finding a doctor, call Member Service at the number on the back of your Highmark member ID card. Advocates are available Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. ET (TTY: 711).

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To learn more about colorectal cancer, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) or call **1-800-227-2345**.

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