

What you should know about colon cancer screening

What is colon cancer?

Colon cancer is cancer of the colon (lower part of the digestive system) or rectum (the last 6 inches of the colon). It is also known as colorectal cancer or bowel cancer. It is one of the most common cancers people die from in Ontario. However, when colon cancer is caught early, 9 out of 10 people with the disease can be cured.

Colon cancer starts from abnormal growths on the lining of the colon or rectum, called polyps. Not all polyps turn into cancer, but some polyps may turn into cancer over time.

What is cancer screening?

Cancer screening (getting checked for cancer) is testing done on people who are at risk of getting cancer but have no symptoms and generally feel fine.

ColonCancerCheck is a screening program in Ontario that encourages people who are at risk of getting colon cancer to get screened regularly for the disease.

Who should get screened for colon cancer?

ColonCancerCheck screens 2 groups of eligible people: those at average risk of getting colon cancer and those at increased risk of getting colon cancer.

Average risk: People who are 50 to 74 years old and have had no parents, brothers, sisters or children (first-degree relatives) with colon cancer.

If you are at average risk, you should get screened with a **fecal immunochemical test (FIT)** every 2 years starting at age 50.

Increased risk: People who have had 1 or more parents, brothers, sisters or children (first-degree relatives) with colon cancer.

If you are at increased risk, you should get screened with a colonoscopy starting at age 50, or 10 years earlier than the age your first-degree relative was diagnosed with colon cancer, whichever comes first. How often you get screened depends on the age your first-degree relative was diagnosed.

Talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner about getting screened.



The fecal immunochemical test (FIT) is a stool based test

How do I get a FIT?

Talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner to find out if a FIT is right for you.

If you do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, you can get a FIT by calling Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-828-9213.

If you live in a First Nation community, you can contact your health centre or nursing station for more information.



Ontario Health
Cancer Care Ontario

9 out of 10 people can be cured if colon cancer is caught early.

How do I get screened for colon cancer?

Fecal immunochemical test (FIT)

A FIT checks your stool (poop) for tiny amounts of blood, which could be caused by colon cancer or some types of polyps.

- The FIT is safe and painless
- It can be done at home and only takes a few minutes to do
- You only need to collect 1 stool sample
- You can eat and take medications as usual
- The FIT is free for eligible people through the ColonCancerCheck program
- The FIT can be mailed to your address of choice

An abnormal FIT result means there is blood in your stool. Having blood in your stool does not always mean you have cancer. You will need to get a colonoscopy to find out.

Colonoscopy

A colonoscopy is an exam done at a hospital or clinic that allows a doctor to look at the lining of the entire colon to check for problems. During the exam, the doctor passes a long, flexible tube with a tiny camera on the end through the colon and rectum.

Colonoscopy is for people with an abnormal FIT result or people who are at increased risk of getting colon cancer because they have had 1 or more parents, brothers, sisters or children (first-degree relatives) with the disease. Screening with colonoscopy is not recommended for people at average risk.

What are the symptoms and problems caused by colon cancer?

People usually have no symptoms or problems early on in the disease. As colon cancer grows over time, the following symptoms or problems may start:

- Low red blood cells (anemia) caused by a cancer that is bleeding
- Blood (bright red or very dark) in the stool (poop)
- Unexplained weight loss
- A change in bowel habits (new and persistent diarrhea or constipation) or feeling like the bowel does not empty completely
- New and persistent stomach discomfort

If you are having any of these symptoms or problems, talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

How can I lower my risk of getting colon cancer?

- Have a healthy body weight
- Be physically active as part of everyday life
- Eat a diet rich in fibre (including vegetables, fruit and whole grain)
- Limit red meat and try not to eat processed meat (e.g., bologna, salami)
- Limit alcohol
- Quit smoking and stop using tobacco products
- Consume milk products or calcium rich alternatives
- **Get screened regularly for colon cancer**

For more information on colon cancer screening, please visit:
cancercareontario.ca/colon

Need this information in an accessible format?

1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, info@ontariohealth.ca

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