

# Your colon cancer screening (colonoscopy)

## When should I be screened for colorectal cancer?

- Colorectal cancer is more common in older people, so doctors usually begin screening at age 50.
- Some people may have risk factors that make them more likely to get colorectal cancer at a young age, and they may need to be tested more often. An example is if you have a close family member who has had colon cancer. You should ask your primary care physician (PCP) if this would apply to you as well as where you should get screened.
- A colonoscopy is one of several acceptable ways for to be screened for colon cancer. Ask your (PCP) about the other methods and how often you should get them done.

## What to expect

- A colonoscopy allows your doctor to examine much of your colon. This outpatient service is sometimes used to diagnose a problem. Before you have this test, you are asked to prepare by changing your diet for a day and taking medicine to clean out your colon. This “bowel prep” is very important to completing the colonoscopy. On the

day of the exam, you are given medicine to make you relaxed and sleepy. The device to look at the inside of the surface of the colon is a flexible tube about the thickness of a small finger with a light, lens and tools for sampling tissue. This tube is put into your rectum allowing your doctor to look at your entire colon. The tube may also be used to remove tissue during the exam to check for signs of disease. A colonoscopy may be uncomfortable, but it is usually not painful.

## Questions to ask your doctor:

- Are there certain medicines I should stop taking before my colonoscopy?
- Will I need to clean out my colon the day before the test? If so, how?
- After the colonoscopy is over, when can I go home?
- How soon after will I know the results of any findings or follow up steps I may need to take?
- After the screening, when will I be able to eat or drink something?
- When can I go back to work and drive a car?

## Related bills to expect:

- 1) Facility
- 2) Performing doctor
  - Gastroenterologist or surgeon who performs the test
  - Pathologist - only if a biopsy was performed
  - Anesthesiologist, if required

## Helpful tips:

- The location of where your screening is performed greatly affects the cost but does not necessarily affect the quality of the test itself (e.g. hospital vs. outpatient facility)
- Before you go home, the doctor will tell you if any biopsy was done or any visible changes were found in the colon. If a biopsy was done, never assume that not hearing from your doctor means everything was fine. Call your doctor if she or he has not contacted you within two weeks following your screening.
- What is or is not covered by your health insurance may be different depending on whether this screening is coded/billed as preventive vs. diagnostic by your doctor. It is generally billed as diagnostic if your doctor removes any polyps or if you have symptoms.

## Your colonoscopy experience: (there may be variations in your care path):

Day before	Day of screening	The screening itself	After the screening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow your doctor's orders or prescription related to your bowel preparation</li> <li>• Bowel preparation includes diet instructions as well as the medicines for cleaning the bowel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not eat</li> <li>• You must have someone take you to the facility, stay there, and bring you home</li> <li>• Wear comfortable clothing that is easily removed</li> <li>• Leave your jewelry and valuables at home</li> <li>• Arrive early</li> <li>• Have your insurance information, your health history and a list of medicines you take with you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will need to change into an exam gown</li> <li>• Your performing physician will briefly meet with you and go through your medical history</li> <li>• Remind you doctor of any drug allergies</li> <li>• Be certain to tell your doctor if you did not follow the bowel preparation or accidentally ate or drank before the screening</li> <li>• You will be given medicines to relax you and make you sleepy</li> <li>• The average screening takes about 30 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will be awakened slowly</li> <li>• The performing doctor will discuss your results – make certain the person with you takes good notes</li> <li>• You will be able to get dressed and allowed to be driven home</li> <li>• You should not operate heavy machinery or drive until the next day</li> </ul>