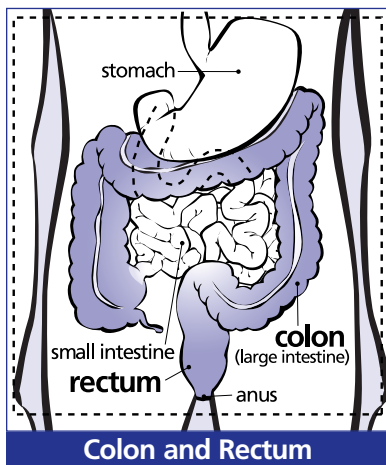


What Is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that occurs in the colon or rectum.

Sometimes it is called colon cancer, for short. As the drawing shows, the colon is the large intestine or large bowel. The rectum is the passageway that connects the colon to the anus.



The 2nd-Leading Cancer Killer

Colorectal cancer is the 2nd-leading cancer killer in the United States, but it doesn't have to be. If everybody age 50 or older had regular screening tests, at least one-third of deaths from this cancer could be avoided. So, if you are 50 or older, start getting tested now.

Who Gets Colorectal Cancer?

- Men and women of any racial or ethnic group can get colorectal cancer.
- Colorectal cancer most often is found in people 50 and older.
- As we get older, the risk for getting colorectal cancer increases.

Are You At High Risk?

Your risk for colorectal cancer may be higher than average if:

- You or a close relative have had colorectal polyps (growths) or colorectal cancer; or
- You have inflammatory bowel disease (such as colitis or Crohn's disease).

If any of these is true for you, you may need to begin testing earlier or have tests more frequently than other people. Talk to your doctor about when you should begin screening and how often you should be tested.

Screening Saves Lives

If you're 50 or older, getting a screening test for colorectal cancer could save your life. Here's how:

- Colorectal cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum. A polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there.
- Over time, some polyps can turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can find polyps so they can be removed **before** they turn into cancer.
- Screening tests can also find colorectal cancer early. When this cancer is found early, the chance of being cured is good.



Colorectal Cancer Can Start With No Symptoms

Polyps and colorectal cancer don't always cause symptoms, especially at first. This means that someone could have polyps or colorectal cancer and not know it. That is why having a screening test is so important.

What Are The Symptoms?

Some people with colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer do have symptoms, which may include:

- Blood in or on your stool (bowel movement).
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that happen a lot and you don't know why.
- A change in bowel habits, such as having stools that are thinner than usual.
- Losing weight and you don't know why.

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. These symptoms may also be caused by something other than cancer. However, the only way to know what is causing them is to see your doctor.

Screening Tests and Medicare Coverage

Several tests can be used to detect polyps or colorectal cancer. Each can be used alone. Sometimes they are used in combination with each other. People age 50 or older with Medicare are eligible for colorectal cancer screening. There is no age limit for colonoscopy.

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test or Stool Test** — You receive a test kit from your doctor or other health care provider. At home, you put a small stool sample 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.

Medicare: Covers once a year. You pay nothing.

- **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy** — 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.

Medicare: Covers every 4 years. You pay 20% of approved amount after Part B deductible.*

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test Plus Flexible Sigmoidoscopy** — Your doctor may ask you to have both tests. Some experts believe that by using both, there is a better chance of finding polyps or colorectal cancer.

Medicare: See above.

- **Colonoscopy** — This is similar to flexible sigmoidoscopy, except the doctor uses a longer 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. You will be given medication to help you relax and are advised not to drive or work on the day of the exam.

Medicare: Covers every 10 years if you are not at high risk for colorectal cancer, but not within 4 years of having screening flexible sigmoidoscopy. Covers every 2 years if you are at high risk. There is no age limit for colonoscopy. You pay 20% of Medicare approved amount after yearly Part B deductible.*

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

- **Barium Enema** — You are given an enema with a liquid called barium. Then the doctor takes an x-ray. The barium allows the doctor to see the outline of your colon on the x-ray to check for polyps or anything else that needs to be checked.

Medicare: Your doctor may order this test as a substitute for flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy. It is covered every 4 years if you are not at high risk or covered every 2 years if you are at high risk for colorectal cancer. You pay 20% of approved amount after the yearly Part B deductible.

- * *If flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy is done in an ambulatory surgical center or hospital outpatient department, you pay 25% of Medicare approved amount.*

More Information

For more information about Medicare coverage, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. Or visit www.medicare.gov.

For more information about colorectal cancer and screening, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/ScreenforLife or call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service: 1-800-4-CANCER. For TTY call 1-800-332-8615.

