



45 or older?

It's time to think about a colonoscopy!

Part of getting older involves paying closer attention to your health and taking good preventive measures to help you live your healthiest life. If you're age 45 or older, a colon cancer screening – known as a colonoscopy – should be on your to-do list.

Why do I need a colonoscopy?

Most colorectal cancers start as polyps on the lining of your colon or rectum, long before you have any symptoms of cancer. Regular screenings starting when you are 45 (or younger if you have certain risk factors) are the best way to find and remove polyps before they develop into cancer.

Scheduling your colonoscopy

Your primary care provider will refer you to a doctor who can perform your colonoscopy. When you call to schedule it, the staff will collect your medical history and answer any questions you have. They will also send you detailed instructions for preparing for your procedure. Be sure to schedule your appointment on a day you can take off from work and have someone available to be with you.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

During a colonoscopy, a colonoscope – which is a flexible lighted tube with a camera lens on the end – is gently inserted into your rectum and up into your colon so the doctor can look for polyps or abnormalities. The procedure is quick – usually only 30-60 minutes. But plan to be at the office or hospital outpatient clinic for 2-3 hours. It's important to know that you will need to have someone drive you to and home from your procedure and stay with you for the whole day.



Everybody Benefits

How to prepare for a colonoscopy

You need to clean out your colon (also called “bowel”) before the procedure so the doctor can thoroughly examine it. Many people think preparing for a colonoscopy is worse than the procedure itself.

A week before...

- Read the preparation instructions very carefully – you may need to alter your diet or medications for several days before your procedure. If you do not understand anything, call the doctor’s office.
- Pick up your prep items. These may be prescriptions or over the counter items, depending on the prep your doctor wants you to use.

The day before...

Follow the instructions carefully. You won’t want to do much during the day since you will not be able to eat any solid foods. Once you start your prep, you will not want to leave your home.

- Don’t eat any solid foods.
- Drink lots of clear liquids.
- Start your prep at the time indicated in your instructions, usually in the evening.
- Stay close to the bathroom and make sure you have plenty of toilet paper. You will be making frequent trips to clear your bowels (colon and rectum).

The day of...

You will finish your prep several hours before your procedure. When you arrive at the doctor’s office, they will check you in and get your driver’s phone number. You will change into a hospital gown and a nurse will put an I.V. in your arm for the sedative or anesthesia you will be given for the procedure. You will then be brought into the procedure room for your colonoscopy. Most people experience very little or no discomfort during the procedure.

After your colonoscopy

After the procedure is done, you will be observed in the recovery area until the sedation medication has worn off. Your doctor will review the results and follow-up instructions with you before you leave. Effects of the medication can linger in your system, so don’t plan to work, drive, drink alcohol, or make any important decisions for the rest of the day. You can return to your normal diet and activities the day after your colonoscopy.



Remember...

A colonoscopy is considered the gold standard of screening because it can find and remove polyps during the same procedure. The screening is also fully covered by your health insurance. It is normal to be nervous about getting a colonoscopy if you’ve never had one before. But remember, the anticipation is likely worse than the procedure itself! If you have questions or concerns, ask your doctor. Being prepared and knowing what to expect can help.



For more information:

- US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, [Get Screened for Colorectal Cancer](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Colorectal Cancer](#)
- American Cancer Society, [Colorectal Cancer](#)



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