

Let's Talk About Health



Health Screenings that Detect Colon Cancer and Lifestyle Choices that May Help Reduce the Risk of Developing it:

A comprehensive guide for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers



Mainstreaming Medical Care Program



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*A comprehensive guide for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers**

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This booklet was prepared in 2009, relying on information from the American Cancer Society and other widely accepted medical sources. Recognizing that future medical advances and breakthroughs may alter some of the information provided here, it is important to stress that **individuals should always rely on the medical advice of their doctor, as well as a second opinion when indicated, to determine the best treatment approach in any given situation.*

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What is cancer?

- ▶ Cancer is a group of fast-growing cells in your body that are not normal. Most cancers are named for the organ or type of cell in which they start (for example, cancer that starts in the *colon* is called *colon cancer*).
- ▶ Sometimes people are afraid to talk about cancer. But the more you know about your body and about the things you can do to reduce your risk for cancer, the longer and healthier your life will be.
- ▶ There are many treatments available for cancer. The earlier cancer is found (diagnosed), the easier it is to treat and the better the chance that the treatment will be successful.
- ▶ The best way to find cancer early is for your doctor to regularly perform the appropriate cancer screenings (tests). Even if you are feeling embarrassed or afraid, it is still very important to have these tests done.
- ▶ Many people never get cancer! And many people who do get cancer are successfully treated and go on to live long and happy lives.

What causes cancer?

- ▶ Doctors usually cannot explain why a person develops cancer. But there are certain **risk factors** that increase the chance that a person will develop cancer.
- ▶ Some risk factors just exist and cannot be changed, like your age, whether you are a man or woman, and your family's health (medical) history.
- ▶ Other risk factors come from something you do (a behavior), like smoking. If you avoid these kinds of behaviors, and replace them with healthier behaviors, you can lower your risk for cancer.

What is colon cancer?

- ▶ Colon cancer is cancer of the large intestine (colon), which is the lower part of your digestive system.
- ▶ Colon cancer almost always starts with a **polyp**, which is a small growth inside the colon that can turn into cancer. Testing can find and remove polyps before they become cancerous, or can find cancer early, when treatment has a better chance of being successful.
- ▶ Colon cancer affects both men and women.

Are there symptoms of colon cancer?

- ▶ Many people with colon cancer don't have symptoms in the early stages of the disease. The symptoms below can be symptoms of colon cancer, but can also be symptoms of other conditions.
 - A change in your bowel habits, like diarrhea or constipation, that lasts more than a few days
 - A change in the shape or consistency of your stool (poop), including mucus in the stool
 - Black stools or dark red blood in the stool
 - Feeling like you have to have a bowel movement even after you already had one
 - Abdominal pain
 - Unexplained weight loss

- ▶ It is very important to call your doctor if you are having any of these symptoms, no matter how recently you've been screened for colon cancer.



What are the risk factors for colon cancer?

- ▶ **Age:** Colon cancer is most common in men and women over age 50.
- ▶ **Family History:** The risk for colon cancer is higher if there is a family history of colon cancer (be sure to tell your doctor right away if someone in your family has had colon cancer).
- ▶ **Obesity:** The risk for colon cancer is higher for people who are obese (extremely overweight).
- ▶ **Eating high-fat foods:** The risk for colon cancer is higher for people who eat a lot of high-fat foods, like fried foods and butter.
- ▶ **Lack of exercise:** The risk for colon cancer is higher for people who don't exercise.



What can I do about colon cancer?

- 1) **Make changes to your daily living habits** that can help reduce your risk for colon cancer and can help you feel better in general. This booklet talks about some of these healthy changes starting on page 4.
- 2) **Be aware of changes in your bowel habits.** It is important to know what your normal bowel movements look like so that you can tell your doctor right away if you notice changes (see the list of symptoms on page 2).
- 3) **See your doctor for regular colon cancer screenings (tests).** Starting when you are 50 (or possibly earlier if a member of your family has had colon cancer), there are two tests that your doctor will perform: the **Fecal Occult Blood Test**, which is done once each year, and the **Colonoscopy**, which is done every ten years (or more often if polyps were found during an earlier colonoscopy, or if there is a family history of colon cancer). When colon cancer is diagnosed early, there is a much better chance that treatment will be successful.



EAT MORE FIBER

■ Fiber is the part of a plant that your body can't digest. Fiber moves through your digestive system, absorbs water and helps form your waste.

■ Fiber helps to regulate your bowel movements by improving the colon's normal movement, and by preventing dietary waste from staying in the colon for too long.

■ Good sources of fiber include oats and oat bran, legumes (dried beans and peas), some seeds, carrots, broccoli, oranges and bananas (*a bowl of cereal has fiber and can be a good snack*).

■ You can also ask your doctor if taking a fiber supplement would be a good idea for you.



DRINK WATER

■ It is important to drink water when you eat your fiber (think of fiber as a sponge - when it is dry, it doesn't work).

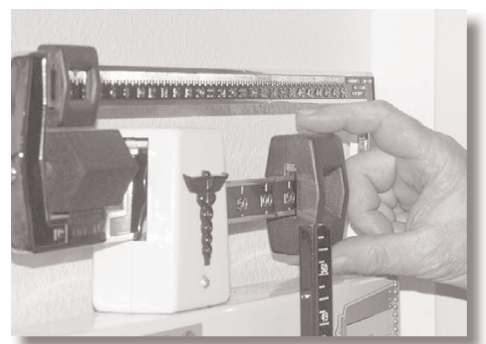
■ It is good to drink five (5) glasses of water each day - a glass with every meal and two more in between meals - to get the best results.



MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

■ Talk to your doctor or nurse about what a healthy weight for you should be - ***and if you need to lose weight, do it!***

■ You can lose weight by exercising and by decreasing the amount of fatty foods you eat (joining a weight-loss support group can also be helpful).





EXERCISE REGULARLY

■ It is important to get 30 minutes of exercise every day. If you can't do 30 minutes at one time, do 10 minutes three times each day.

■ Walking, swimming, dancing and housework are ways to include exercise into your daily routine. Sometimes it helps to exercise with a friend.



REDUCE STRESS

■ Reducing stress gives your immune system a boost that can help to prevent cancer.

■ Things you can do to reduce stress include focusing on something pleasant, listening to music or relaxation tapes, and talking to someone (it is important to have close friends and family members who will listen to you and support you). Exercise is also a great way to reduce stress!



DON'T SMOKE

■ Smoking and/or chewing tobacco increases your risk for colon and other types of cancer.

■ **If you smoke, quit now.** There are treatments available that can help, so talk to your doctor about what is best for you (joining a stop-smoking support group can also be helpful).

■ Don't be afraid to quit - *you will feel so much better when you stop smoking!*



Some studies show that taking one low-dose "baby" aspirin each day (81 mg), starting at age 50, may lower your risk for colon cancer. But you need to talk to your doctor about this, because low-dose aspirin is not recommended for everyone (some people have side effects from aspirin and should not take it).

There are two screening procedures (tests) that check for colon cancer. You should begin having these screenings at age 50 (your doctor may want to start these tests earlier or perform them more often if someone in your family has had colon cancer).

1. FECAL OCCULT BLOOD TEST

▶ The Fecal Occult Blood Test usually begins at age 50 and should be performed every year (it is part of the PAP exam for women and the prostate exam for men).

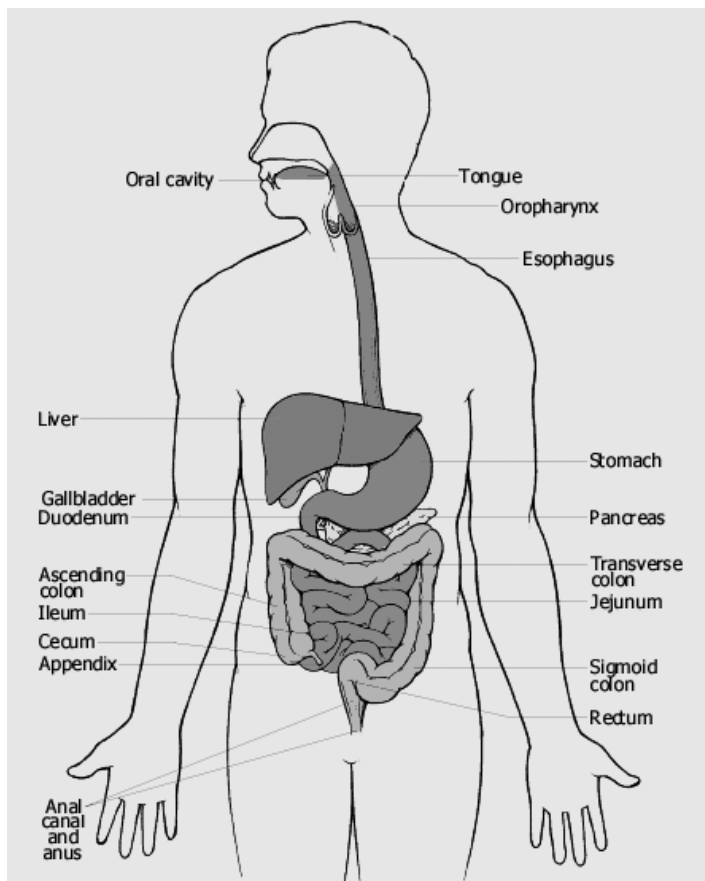
▶ The purpose of this test is to look for occult (hidden) blood in your stool.

▶ The doctor will insert one gloved finger into your rectum (the opening to your colon that's between your buttocks), and then wipe it on a cardboard card. A special solution will then be dropped on to the card, which will give either a positive or negative result.

▶ If the test is positive, the doctor will order additional tests, such as further sampling that you will need to do at home, or a Colonoscopy (see page 7).

▶ Even though it might feel embarrassing or uncomfortable to talk about, it is very important to tell your doctor if you have noticed any blood in your stools or bleeding when you have a bowel movement.

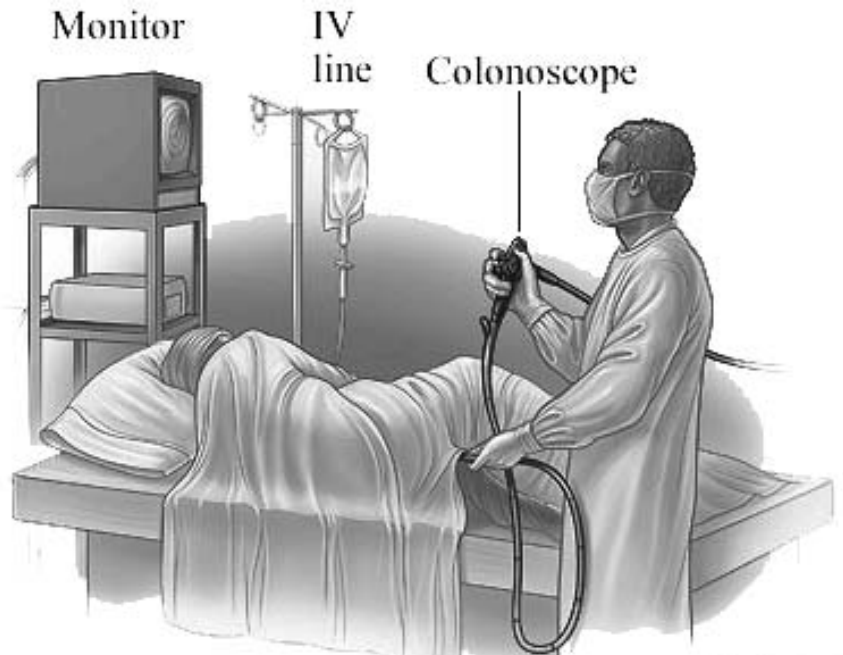
▶ Some medications might cause false positive tests, so it is important to review your medications with the doctor. It is also very important to tell your doctor at least one week before the procedure if you take aspirin or any other type of blood thinner.



2. COLONOSCOPY

► At age 50, or earlier if you are at high risk for colon cancer, your doctor will order a Colonoscopy. It is usually done every 10 years, but sometimes the doctor wants the Colonoscopy done more often, especially if you are at high risk for colon cancer.

► A Colonoscopy allows the doctor to see the entire colon with a long, lighted tube that is inserted into the rectum. The doctor can see and remove any polyps in the colon.



► In order to have a Colonoscopy, you need to make an appointment at a special center or hospital that does this test.

► You will be given detailed directions on what to eat for several days before your appointment. The doctor will also prescribe a liquid diet for the day before the Colonoscopy, and will order pills or liquid to clean out your bowels (your colon will need to be empty of any waste). *It is important to follow all the directions carefully.*

► On the day of your Colonoscopy, you will need to have someone with you who can bring you home. You may be given anesthesia (a type of drug that puts you in a deep sleep) so that you don't feel the procedure being performed.

► The doctor will tell you right way if any polyps were found and removed during the Colonoscopy (even if polyps are removed during a Colonoscopy, you will feel fine and will be able to go back to your usual routine the next day).






► The doctor will tell you when you'll need to have a Colonoscopy done again (usually every 10 years), and will send a report to your primary health care doctor. If polyps were found, you may need to have a Colonoscopy more often (every 3-5 years).

REDUCING YOUR RISK: *Developing healthy eating habits*

A few simple changes in your daily meal preparation and eating habits can help you feel better in general, and can help reduce your risk for colon and other types of cancer.

- ▶ Plan your menus for the week
- ▶ Eat extra-lean meat, chicken or fish
- ▶ Trim the fat off meat before cooking
- ▶ Try not to use too much butter
- ▶ Do not add salt
- ▶ Buy a set of measuring cups and a food scale, and always measure or weigh portions

The key to healthy eating is **PORTION CONTROL** (eating the right amounts of food). You can do this by learning to compare a serving size to an item you already know:

Type of Food:	Measurement:	About the size of:	
Meat	3 Ounces, cooked	A deck of cards	
Pasta	½ Cup, cooked	A tennis ball	
Bagel	4 Ounces	A hockey puck	
Rice	½ Cup, cooked	Half of a baseball	
Cheese	1 Ounce	4 Dice	 x 4

What does a healthy diet look like?



GRAINS AND STARCHES (Choose 6-8 servings each day)

*Includes bread, pasta, potatoes and corn. A serving is 1 slice of bread, ½ an English muffin or pita bread, ¾ cup dry cereal, ½ cup cooked cereal, ½ cup potato, yam, peas, corn or cooked beans, or ½ cup of cooked rice or pasta. It is important to choose more **whole grains** (for instance, brown rice, whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat or brown-rice pasta).*

VEGETABLES (Choose at least 3-5 servings each day)

A serving is 1 cup raw or ½ cup cooked vegetables.

FRUIT (Choose 2-4 servings each day)

A serving is ½ cup canned fruit (in fruit juice or light syrup) or 1 small piece of fresh fruit, 1 cup of melon or raspberries, or 1 ¼ cup of strawberries.

MILK/DAIRY (Choose 2-3 servings each day)

A serving is 1 cup of non-fat or low-fat milk, or 1 cup of reduced-calorie yogurt.

MEAT AND MEAT SUBSTITUTES (Choose 4-6 oz. each day, divided between meals)

Includes lean beef, skinless chicken or turkey, fish, eggs, tofu, dried beans, cheese, cottage cheese and peanut butter. A serving size is 3 oz of meat, 1 egg, 1 TBSP peanut butter, or ½ cup of tofu.

FATS AND SWEETS (Keep servings small and save them for a special treat!)

Includes potato chips, candy, cookies, cakes, crackers and fried foods. These contain a lot of fat and/or sugar, and are not as nutritious as vegetables or whole grains. A serving is ½ cup of ice cream, 1 small cupcake or muffin, or 2 small cookies.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is an important nutrient for good health and can reduce your risk for colon and other types of cancer. Many adults do not get enough Vitamin D in their diets, so talk to your doctor about taking Vitamin D supplements and/or spending 10-15 minutes outside each day, in direct sunlight.

What does a sample menu look like?

Food choices can be very personal and differ greatly from one family to another. The sample menu below gives some examples of how foods can be exchanged to create a balanced diet.



BREAKFAST

- Cereal (Starch)
- Sliced banana (Fruit)
- Whole-wheat toast with cottage cheese (Starch, Protein)
- Low-fat milk (Dairy, Protein)
- Coffee

BREAKFAST OPTION

Don't feel like cereal for breakfast? Have eggs instead (or egg substitute) as your protein and a whole-grain english muffin or crackers as a substitute for the starches.

LUNCH

- Chunk-style vegetable soup (Starch, Vegetable, Protein)
- Tuna sandwich (Starch, Protein)
- Fruit cup (Fruit)
- Tea or diet soda

LUNCH OPTION

At a local pizzeria for lunch? The crust will count as starch, the tomato sauce and vegetable toppings (mushrooms, green peppers, and onions, for example) will cover your vegetable exchange, and the cheese is a good source of protein. Watch out for the fat content by avoiding meat toppings.

DINNER

- Baked chicken (Protein)
- Baked potato (Starch)
- Green salad (Vegetable)
- Water or tea
- Sugar-free Jell-O

DINNER OPTION

Invited to a friend's for dinner? Enjoy the grilled chicken breast, corn on the cob, and vegetable-filled salad. Since the corn was the only starch exchange with your meal, you may be able to enjoy a small slice of angel food cake with a few fresh strawberries!

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUR FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

► It is important for you to ask your family members (mom, dad, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles) about your **FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY** and about any diseases or cancers they have now, or have had in the past. When there is a history in your family of a certain disease (diabetes, heart disease) or a certain type of cancer, your risk for developing it increases.

► Sometimes relatives get upset when you talk about cancer. Tell them you need to know so that you can tell your doctor. This way, *you are taking care of your health and advocating for yourself.*

► **It is important for your doctor to know your family health history.** You need to tell your doctor if someone in your family has had colon cancer or other types of cancer. It will make a difference in how early and how often your doctor performs regular colon cancer screenings. It will also alert your doctor to follow you more closely for this type of cancer.

► **It is a very good idea to have a written record of your family health history.**



What is the good news about colon cancer?

► **COLON CANCER SCREENING (TESTING) CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE!**

Colon cancer almost always starts with a **polyp**, and testing can find polyps **before** they become cancerous - *so talk to your doctor about colon cancer screening.*

► If polyps are removed before they become cancerous, colon cancer can be prevented.

► You can lower your risk for colon cancer by eating a low-fat diet and lots of fruits and vegetables.

For more information about colon and other types of cancer, contact:

The American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org