

# What You Need to Know to About Colon Health



Most cases of colon cancer begin as small, benign polyps. They can be very small and usually there aren't any symptoms. However, over time, the polyps grow and can become cancerous. That's why regular screening colonoscopy is recommended so colon cancer can be prevented. Colonoscopy is performed largely to remove benign polyps before they turn into cancer.

## WHEN DOES SCREENING FOR COLON CANCER START?

Generally, colonoscopy for colon cancer screenings begin at age 50. Your doctor may recommend you start earlier if you have other risk factors, such as a family history of the disease. If there are no concerns with your first screening, your next screening colonoscopy would be in 10 years.

If you have other risk factors, your doctor may recommend screening colonoscopy again in 5 years.



## FOR ALL AGES – WHEN TO SEEK HELP:

**Seek care right away** when you have severe anal pain and bleeding from your rectum, particularly with discomfort or pain in your abdomen, diarrhea, or fever.

### See your doctor if you have:

- A change in your bowel habits – diarrhea or constipation or a change in the consistency of your stool – that lasts longer than four weeks
- Rectal bleeding or blood in your stool
- Persistent stomach discomfort – cramps or gas or pain
- A feeling that your bowel doesn't empty completely
- Unexplained weight loss

## PREVENTING COLON CANCER

- **Eat foods that are high in fiber:** Fill your plate with fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds. The best vegetables for fiber include broccoli, cabbage, carrots, dark leafy vegetables, zucchini, and grapes. Try for 5 servings a day.
- **Drink plenty of water:** Aim for 64 ounces of water per day. You know you are drinking enough when your urine is light yellow in color.
- **Exercise regularly:** Exercise 30 to 60 minutes per day at a moderate or intense level. Studies show exercise lowers your risk of colon cancer. A more immediate benefit is that exercise helps prevent constipation.
- **Get the recommended level of Vitamin D:** Spend 10 minutes a day outdoors.

Source: NIH News in Health, [www.nih.gov/wellnesstoolkits](http://www.nih.gov/wellnesstoolkits)

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