WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING

Who should be screened for colorectal cancer?

• All adults should undergo screening beginning at age 50 years.
• Persons with family members who have colorectal cancer or other risk factors may start screening before age 50 years.
• Remember that when your doctor suggests a screening test, it does not mean he or she thinks you have cancer.

How does screening prevent cancer?

• Screening can find abnormal growths (polyps) so they can be removed before they turn into cancer.
• If cancer has developed, screening can detect it early, when it is highly curable.
• If colorectal cancer is found early, surgery can cure it, but cancer found later may not be curable.
• Colorectal cancer often does not cause symptoms until it has become advanced and spread.

What tests are used for screening?

• High-sensitivity fecal occult blood test examines stool under a microscope to see if it contains any blood, which can be a sign of polyps or cancer.
• Flexible sigmoidoscopy uses a thin, flexible, lighted tube to view inside the rectum and sigmoid colon (the lower part of the colon) for polyps or signs of cancer.
• Colonoscopy is similar to flexible sigmoidoscopy, except the doctor uses a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube to view inside the entire colon.
• Most polyps and some cancer found during sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy can be removed during the test.

• Your doctor can help you decide which screening test is best for you.

If screening works, why do some people avoid it?

• About 1 in 3 adults aged 50 to 75 years have not been tested for colorectal cancer as recommended.
• Some people do not know they should be tested or are unaware of the benefits of regular screening.
• Some are worried that the test will be uncomfortable or embarrassing.
• Some are uncertain whether their insurance will cover the procedure.
• If you are worried, you can talk with your doctor about these and any other concerns.

For More Information

www.healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/doctor-visits/screening-tests/get-tested-for-colorectal-cancer#take-action_1
What to know and how to get tested for colorectal cancer from U.S. Health and Human Services in English and Spanish.

www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening
www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening/questions.htm
Facts on colorectal cancer screening and questions to ask your doctor from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Guide to Colon Cancer Prevention from Consumer Reports.

www.cancer.org/cancer/colonandrectumcancer/moreinformation/colonandrectumcancerearlydetection/index
Information on tests to detect colorectal cancer and polyps from the American Cancer Society.