

## FIT Test for Colorectal Cancer

### Overview

To help screen for colorectal cancer, we recommend that you take an annual fecal immunochemical test (FIT). You can take this test at home and then mail it to our laboratories for analysis. To stay up to date on your screening, you'll need to take the test every year. If you have had a colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy, please check with your doctor before doing a FIT test.



FIT can detect small amounts of occult (hidden) blood in your stool. The test is quick and easy to take and requires no special preparation. It is most commonly used to screen for colorectal cancer, though occult blood can sometimes be caused by other conditions of the digestive tract, like Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.

There are several similar tests on the market that all screen for occult blood in stool. One is the fecal occult blood test (FOBT), which is very similar to the FIT kit. We prefer the FIT kit over similar tests due to its accuracy in detecting hidden blood and because it's easy to take and convenient for our members.

#### Videos

- [What You Need to Know About Flexible Sigmoidoscopy](#)
- [Screen for Colon Cancer with FIT](#)
- [Screen for Colon Cancer with FIT \(Spanish\)](#)

### Why It Is Done

#### Screening for colorectal cancer

Colorectal cancer often begins as polyps, which are small growths inside the lining of the colon. While most polyps are harmless (benign), they may turn into cancer, and thus should be monitored, especially in adults over the age of 50.

Since these polyps grow on the inside of the lining of the colon, they sometimes bleed when brushed by stool moving through the colon. Blood in the stool could be an indication of these polyps, which is why testing for this kind of blood is an effective way to screen for colorectal cancer.

### How It Is Performed

A stool test is a very quick test with no known side effects. The test is done with a sample of your stool (feces) that you collect yourself. It is most common to do this test at home with a kit you receive in the mail.

You do not have to make any special preparations for this test or change your diet beforehand. We will provide all the supplies you need to do this test at home.

After you have a bowel movement, you place a small sample of your stool in a tube. Then you mail the tube to a Kaiser Permanente lab, where we analyze the sample and look for traces of blood that may be an early sign of colorectal cancer.

To stay up to date on your screening, you'll need to take this test every year.

## Alternatives

There are several ways to screen for colorectal cancer. We can discuss the options and decide together which is best for you, including one of the following screening tests:

### Flexible sigmoidoscopy

A flexible sigmoidoscopy is similar to a colonoscopy, but only part of the colon is examined. The entire colon is 4 to 5 feet long, but a flexible sigmoidoscopy examines only the lowest 2 feet of the colon, called the sigmoid and descending colon. Because this test examines a shorter part of the colon, it is usually done in our offices instead of in the hospital. This procedure does not require any sedation.

There is less preparation needed for a flexible sigmoidoscopy than for a colonoscopy. You will need to take several enemas or an oral laxative 2 hours before the exam to clear your lower colon and rectum. We'll also ask you to change your diet for several days before the exam.

### Colonoscopy

During a colonoscopy, the entire length of the colon is examined from your small intestine to your rectum. While you are under sedation, we insert a long, flexible tube into your rectum and move it slowly through the length of your colon. A video camera at the tip of the tube allows us to search for abnormalities, which we can then sample or remove for analysis. If we find abnormalities (polyps, for example), we may take a small biopsy (sample for testing) or remove the abnormal tissue.

A colonoscopy is usually considered an outpatient procedure, meaning that you will not have to stay in the hospital overnight. You are sedated for the procedure and will need someone to drive you home afterwards. You will need time to prepare for the procedure by altering your diet and drinking a strong laxative the day before your procedure to clear your colon of waste.

For people at higher risk of colon cancer, a colonoscopy is the preferred method of screening for colorectal cancer because it allows the doctor to see the entire colon.

### Barium enema

A barium enema is an X-ray of your colon. During the exam, we insert a thin tube into your colon through your anus. With this tube, we fill your colon with barium, a liquid that shows contrast during an X-ray. Then we take a standard X-ray of your abdomen. This allows us to see any abnormal tissue or growths in your colon wall.

You will need to prepare for this exam just as you would for a flexible sigmoidoscopy. We may recommend laxatives or enemas to clear the colon in preparation for the exam and changes to your diet in the day or two before the test.