

## Should Adults Aged 76-85 Have Colorectal Cancer Screening?

National experts agree that adults aged 76 to 85 years should make an **individual decision** about whether to screen for colorectal cancer. An individual decision means that some patients will decide to have regular screenings for colorectal cancer and others may decide not to screen. There are three screening options: no testing, a stool test, and a colonoscopy.

### Key points

- Colorectal cancer screening can help prevent cancer and find cancer early when it may be easier to treat.
- If you have had normal screening results in the past, you may have a very low chance of developing colorectal cancer and having additional tests may not be helpful to you.
- The chance of having a serious complication with a colonoscopy is higher for older patients and for patients who have health problems.
- Screening and not screening are both reasonable options. The best option for you will depend on your overall health, your screening history, and your health goals.
- Recent events with COVID-19 have led to some delays for routine screening colonoscopies.

### Purpose

This sheet will explain the three main options, including no screening, and will also help you get ready to talk with your doctor about your goals. This handout is for people aged 76-85 who are at average risk for colorectal cancer. Ask your doctor if you are not sure what your risk is.

### People make different choices based on their situation and goals.

Here are some quotes from our patients discussing choices they have made:

*“Given my family history of colon cancer, I want to keep going with the colonoscopy.”*

*“I didn’t know about the stool tests—that seems like an easier way to keep testing.”*

*“It would be wonderful if I didn’t have to do the test [colonoscopy] anymore. I’m happy to be done!”*

## Three Options (No further testing, Stool test, and Colonoscopy):

| What do I need to do for each option?   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>No tests at this time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can focus on other health concerns or goals.</li> <li>Contact your doctor if you have any changes in your bowel habits or blood in your stool.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Stool test:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You need to collect a sample of your stool at home.</li> <li>You need to send the sample to a lab to check for blood or other signs of cancer.</li> <li>If the test result is positive, you will need to undergo further testing, such as a colonoscopy.</li> <li>You will need to repeat the stool test every year.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Colonoscopy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You need to do the colonoscopy preparation.</li> <li>You are usually sedated for the colonoscopy.</li> <li>You need someone to drive you home after the test.</li> <li>You need to repeat the test every 10 years, or more often (from 3 to 5 years) if something is found.</li> </ul>                        |
| What are the main benefits?   |  |   |
| <p><b>No tests at this time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You do not need to collect a stool sample.</li> <li>You can avoid the preparation and serious complications with colonoscopy.</li> </ul>                      | <p><b>Stool test:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A small number of people may be prevented from dying of colorectal cancer.</li> <li>You can collect the stool sample at home.</li> <li>You can avoid the preparation and serious complications with colonoscopy.</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Colonoscopy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A small number of people may be prevented from dying of colorectal cancer.</li> <li>Some cancers are found early, when it may be easier to treat.</li> <li>During the procedure, polyps can be removed.</li> <li>If the result is normal, it may be the last colorectal cancer test you will need.</li> </ul> |
| What are the main harms or downsides?   |  |   |
| <p><b>No tests at this time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may find cancer at a later stage.</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Stool test:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the test result is abnormal, you will need to have a colonoscopy.</li> <li>If you need to have a colonoscopy, it is considered a diagnostic test (not screening) and the insurance coverage may differ (this varies by insurer).</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Colonoscopy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some people have difficulty with the colonoscopy preparation.</li> <li>Small chance of serious complications such as a tear in the colon, bleeding or infection that may require hospitalization.</li> </ul>  |

## What is the impact of COVID-19?

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|--|---|---|
| <p><b>No tests at this time:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no impact. You do not need to come in for any screening tests or procedures.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Stool test:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the stool test result is abnormal, you might have to wait a few months before you are able to get a colonoscopy due to COVID-19 delays.</li> <li>• The wait time for a colonoscopy ordered because of an abnormal stool test may be shorter than for those who are having a screening colonoscopy.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Colonoscopy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are longer wait times than usual to have a colonoscopy.</li> <li>• A caregiver may not be able to accompany you inside the hospital to the procedure.</li> <li>• You may need to get tested for COVID-19 before the procedure.</li> <li>• The hospital has put many new procedures in place to ensure the safety of patients and employees and to prevent COVID-19 infections.</li> </ul> |
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### Medical Terms Used in This Sheet

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Colorectal              | Refers to the large intestine (colon) and the end of the large intestine (rectum).   |
| Colonoscopy             | Screening test where a long, flexible tube is inserted into the rectum. A tiny video camera allows the doctor to see polyps or cancer inside the entire colon. |
| Colonoscopy Preparation | Drinking a laxative to cleanse the intestines before a colonoscopy.  |
| Polyp                   | A growth in the colon that might turn into cancer.   |
| Screening test          | A test done to look for disease before there are any symptoms or signs of the disease.   |
| Stool                   | Waste from a bowel movement.   |
| Sedation                | Use of medicines to make you calm and sleepy during the colonoscopy procedure; sedation is also called “anesthesia.”   |