



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at Sullivan Benefits

Colon cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related death in men and women. Yet, it can be treated; with chances of success increasing the earlier it is detected. This makes it essential that you get a colonoscopy when you reach age 50.

GETTING A COLONOSCOPY

Even though it is one of the most undesirable medical screenings, a colonoscopy is a useful and effective way of allowing a doctor to view the colon and rectum for abnormalities. This procedure is used to screen for colon and rectal cancer, and investigate recurring issues such as blood in the stool, constipation, diarrhea and lower belly pain.

Who Needs a Colonoscopy?

At age 50, everyone should have a colonoscopy even if they have *no* risk factors. However, if you have a history of colon or rectal cancer in your family or had previous instances of polyps in your colon, you should begin having colonoscopies at age 40.

Preparation

It is imperative that the colon is prepared before a colonoscopy can take place. Generally, 24 hours prior to the test, you will be required to do the following:

- Stop taking medications containing iron as it can alter the color of the colon lining
- Take laxatives and/or enemas to clean out the colon
- Drink clear, nonalcoholic liquids and eat only soft foods that are not red in color
- Take five-minute walks every 10 minutes while taking the laxatives

On the day of the exam, a doctor will ask you to fast or only drink clear liquids up to six hours prior to the exam.

The Procedure

Before the procedure, you will be given a mild sedative to relax and an opiate pain medication to lessen any discomfort. Then, you will lie on your left side and the doctor will insert a colonoscope into your rectum. This tool contains a light, camera and channel which allow the doctor to see inside your colon and pump air to get a better view. In addition, your doctor can insert instruments through the colonoscope to remove polyps or biopsy suspect tissue.

Once the exam is over, you will need to rest for about an hour in the office until the sedative wears off. Then, you should go home and rest for the remainder of the day.

After the procedure, you may feel bloated and pass gas for several hours. To reduce pressure in your gut, walking usually helps. In addition, you may notice a minimal amount of blood in your first stool after the procedure. Both of these side effects are normal, but excessive pain and/or blood in your stool is cause for concern. Consult your doctor if any of these occur.

Results

If your results are good and no abnormal polyps are found, you can typically wait several years before having the exam again. Should your colonoscopy reveal problems, you may have to repeat the test more frequently depending on the exact results. Beyond that, any polyps that were not removed during the procedure may have to be surgically removed at a later time.