

# The Importance of Colonoscopies



A colonoscopy is an exam that allows a doctor to closely look at the inside of the large intestine (colon). The doctor is looking for polyps or signs of cancer in the colon and rectum, the last several inches of the colon. Colon and rectal cancers are referred to as colorectal cancers. In many cases, regular colorectal cancer screenings can prevent colorectal cancers altogether, by finding and removing polyps before they become cancerous.

## When should I have a colonoscopy?

The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends men and women without identified risk factors should begin screenings at age 45.\* People at a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer should begin screening at a younger age and may need to be tested more frequently.

### Risk Factors

Aside from lifestyle related choices, the ACS lists the following as factors which could increase your risk for colorectal cancer:

- Having a personal or family history of colorectal polyps or colorectal cancer
- Having a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease
- Being of African American or Jewish descent
- Having type 2 diabetes



Follow your doctor's instructions completely when preparing for a colonoscopy.

## What should I expect during my colonoscopy?

During a colonoscopy, the doctor will gently insert a thin, flexible, fiber-optic tube with a tiny video camera into the rectum. The video camera sends pictures to a screen for the doctor to view. If anything abnormal, like a polyp, is found during the procedure, it will be removed and tested for cancer.

### Colonoscopy Tips

The ACS suggests the following reminders to help you prepare for your colonoscopy:

- Follow your doctor's instructions completely. If your doctor cannot clearly see the inside of your colon, you may have to be rescheduled.
- Stay close to a bathroom once you begin the laxatives.
- On the day of the procedure, have a family member or friend drive you home.

Early stages of colorectal cancers usually have no symptoms, therefore, regular screenings are important to find colorectal cancers in their early stages when they are small and before they spread. Ask your doctor when you should have your first screening and how often you should be screened.\*

*\*For benefit coverage, visit TRICARE's Covered Services page at [www.tricare.mil/coveredservices](http://www.tricare.mil/coveredservices). Ask your doctor for age recommendations and risk guidelines.*