

Screening for Colorectal Cancer

1. Why is colorectal cancer screening so important?
 - Colorectal cancer is the 2nd most common cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.
 - It affects men and women
 - Early stages of colorectal cancer often have no symptoms
 - Colorectal screening is preventable and curable (over 90% chance of cure) when detected early with annual screening test for occult (hidden) blood

2. What is a fecal occult blood test (FOBT)?
 - Some polyps and cancers bleed in very small amounts that you can't see. This test checks for the little amount of blood "hidden" in your stool.
 - This test can be done at home. With the kit from your doctor, you'll take samples of your stool and mail them to a lab. The instructions with the kit will explain how to perform the test. You will need to avoid certain foods for two days before taking the samples.

3. What does a positive fecal occult blood test mean?

Most patients with a positive FOBT don't have cancer. The test is good at detecting blood in the stool, but it can't tell what caused it. You may need additional tests like a colonoscopy to know the cause of your bleeding. For example, besides colorectal cancer, benign polyps, intestinal inflammation, hemorrhoids and ulcers can also cause bleeding.

4. Who should receive an annual fecal occult blood test?
 - All men and women age 50 or older.
 - Men and women younger than 50 who have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, polyps or other cancers should consult with their doctor about the type of screening tests they need.
 - Anyone who has had rectal bleeding or a change in bowel habits should consult their doctor as soon as possible.

5. The National Cancer Institute Recommendations include:

Beginning at age 50, both men and women should have: A yearly fecal occult blood test plus sigmoidoscopy every 5 years, or colonoscopy every 10 years.

6. Although colon cancer affects many people in our (Vietnamese/Khmer) community, it is preventable and treatable especially when detected early. Along with your traditional health practices, we encourage you to consider the following lifestyle choices:
 - Diet: Eat moderately. Eat less red meat, less salty or fermented food. Eat fruits and vegetables daily. Drink water regularly.
 - Take a multivitamin with folate daily.
 - Don't smoke and limit the use of alcohol.
 - Be active and maintain a healthy weight. Working in the garden or walking is good exercise for you.
 - Relaxation: Find time to relax your body and mind, and adopt a hobby to keep your minds active.