Colorectal Cancer Screening: Colonoscopy

Colon cancer screening can be done with stool testing, imaging tests, or directly by colonoscopy.

What is it?
Colonoscopy is the gold standard for colorectal cancer screening. It allows the healthcare provider to look for polyps and colorectal cancer in the entire colon and rectum. Polyps that have not become cancer can be removed to prevent colon cancer.

How is it done?
A lighted tube with a camera is inserted into the rectum. The camera is connected to a monitor screen to show the inner surface of the colon and rectum. This allows the healthcare provider to examine the rectum and the entire colon for signs of cancer or polyps that have not become cancer yet.

What is the preparation?
Patients must completely empty the bowel with a preparation procedure that may include brief diet changes, laxative (cathartic) medications, and enemas.

What about sigmoidoscopy?
Sigmoidoscopy is related to colonoscopy, but does not allow examination of the whole colon, only the rectum and sigmoid colon. Some polyps or cancers could be missed with sigmoidoscopy. Not all polyps can be removed during a sigmoidoscopy, but they can be sampled and tested to find colon cancer and rectal cancer. A sigmoidoscopy requires enema preparation before the procedure.

For more information about colorectal cancer, screening, risk factors, and treatment, please visit globalcca.org