Colorectal Cancer Screening: Imaging Tests

Colon cancer screening can be done directly by colonoscopy, with stool testing, or with imaging tests like virtual colonoscopy and double-contrast barium enema.

Virtual Colonoscopy

**What is it?**
Virtual colonoscopy uses x-rays and computers (or MRI and computers) to make 3D pictures of the colon and rectum.

**How is it done?**
Air is pumped into the rectum and colon through a tube so the lining can be seen better, and the patient goes through a scanner on a table to take pictures.

**What is the preparation?**
Preparation involves a clear, liquid diet for one to three days before the test, followed by laxatives (cathartics) to empty the colon.

Virtual colonoscopy is less effective than colonoscopy for finding small or flat colorectal polyps and cancers. Abnormal results on an imaging test will require colonoscopy for further diagnosis.

Double-contrast Barium Enema

**What is it?**
A double-contrast barium enema uses x-rays and two contrasts (substances that show up on x-rays) to find abnormalities.

**How is it done?**
Air and barium contrast solution are pumped into the rectum through a tube and an x-ray is used to take a picture.

**What is the preparation?**
The double-contrast barium enema involves colon preparation with laxative (cathartic) medication.

The double-contrast barium enema can find cancer in the earliest stage when it is most treatable. Polyps cannot be removed during the procedure. If polyps or other abnormalities are found, a colonoscopy will be required.

For more information about colorectal cancer, screening, risk factors, and treatment, please visit [globalcca.org](http://globalcca.org)