Colorectal Cancer Screening: Stool Tests

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

Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT or iFOBT)

What is it?
The FIT or iFOBT tests for very small amounts of blood in the stool, a common symptom of colorectal cancer.

How is it done?
The FIT (or iFOBT) involves swabbing a bowel movement and placing the swab on a card. Testing is done at home by the patient.

What is the preparation?
The FIT test requires no colon preparation.

If blood is found, a colonoscopy will be required. The FIT may miss tumors that do not bleed. The test may not find blood from further up the digestive tract, such as the stomach.

Stool DNA Test (or Cologuard)

What is it?
The stool DNA test looks for abnormal DNA in the stool, which is a sign of colorectal cancer. This test is sometimes known by the brand name Cologuard.

How is it done?
The stool DNA test involves the patient collecting a stool sample at home and mailing it to the laboratory.

What is the preparation?
There is no colon preparation involved.

The stool DNA test can find some polyps before they become cancer. Stool DNA testing may also find cancers that do not bleed. The stool DNA test has high detection rates of colorectal cancer.
Guaiac Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)

What is it?
The FOBT tests for small amounts of blood in the stool, a common symptom of colorectal cancer.

How is it done?
The FOBT involves swabbing a bowel movement and placing the swab on a card. Testing is done at home by the patient. It requires multiple days of stool collection.

What is the preparation?
Guaiac FOBT testing requires a restricted diet for several days.

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FOBT has a high false-positive rate, and it may miss tumors that bleed in very small amounts or not at all. If blood is detected, a colonoscopy will be required.

If any of these tests have an abnormal result, colonoscopy is required for further diagnosis.