

Common Questions about the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)

About Colorectal Cancer and Screening

What is colorectal cancer?

Colorectal cancer is cancer that starts in the colon or rectum. Part of the digestive system, the colon and rectum are also called the large bowel or large intestine. Because cancers of the colon and rectum are alike they're called colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer can develop from some polyps (abnormal tissue) that grow on the inner wall of the colon and rectum. Not all polyps are cancerous, but some polyps may turn into cancer. These pre-cancerous polyps can grow for a long time without causing symptoms before they become cancer.

Why should I be screened for colorectal cancer?

In Alberta, colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of death for men and the third for women. Screening is the only way to find colorectal cancer early, when 9 out of 10 cases can be prevented or treated successfully.

Who should be screened for colorectal cancer?

Men and women aged 50 to 74 should be screened for colorectal cancer regularly. If you or someone in your family has had colorectal cancer, talk to your doctor about your risk of cancer and what test you should have. If you're over 74, talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks of screening for colorectal cancer.

About FIT: The Home Stool Test for Colorectal Cancer

What does FIT mean?

The Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) is a home stool test that looks for blood in the stool. There can be many reasons that blood may be found in the stool, including colorectal cancer.

How can I get the FIT?

You can talk with your family doctor about this test. Your family doctor will give you a lab requisition to take to the lab to pick up a FIT kit. Once you've done the FIT at home you bring it back to the lab.

How do I do the FIT?

There are instructions with pictures in the FIT kit. It's an easy test to do—all you have to do is collect a sample of stool on a plastic stick and put the stick into the collection bottle.

How long do I have to wait for my FIT results?

It takes 1 to 2 weeks for the results. The lab sends the test result to your family doctor and the Alberta Colorectal Cancer Screening Program. If you're between 50 and 74, you'll be sent a letter with your test result from the program. If your result shows that there is hidden blood in your stool (an abnormal result), the letter will ask you to speak with your doctor if you haven't already. If you're younger than 50 or over 74, you won't be sent a letter: Instead, your family doctor will follow up with you about the result.

If you're asked to do another home stool test within 1 year of your last one, you won't be sent a result letter: Instead, your family doctor will follow up with you about the result.

What happens if the FIT result is abnormal?

An abnormal result means that there's blood in the stool. This doesn't mean that you have cancer. It tells your doctor that you need a colonoscopy to find out why you have blood in your stool.

How accurate is the FIT result?

No test is 100% accurate. There is a chance that a pre-cancerous polyp or cancer can be missed if it wasn't bleeding when the test was done. Regular screening gives you the best chance of colorectal cancer being found early, when treatment may be more successful.

Is the FIT the only test used for colorectal cancer screening?

The FIT is the recommended screening test for everyone aged 50 to 74 at average risk (no personal or family history of colorectal cancer). Colonoscopy is another test that is used to screen for colorectal cancer in people who have an increased risk. This means that if you've been told you have polyps in your colon, have had colorectal cancer, or have a family history of colorectal cancer, you should talk with your family doctor about colonoscopy.

For more information, please contact:

Cancer Screening Programs

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