

COLONOSCOPY

What is the Purpose of a Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is **the main way to check for diseases of the colon**, such as colitis or cancer, and to remove **colon polyps**.

- A polyp is a mushroom-like growth on the inside wall of the colon or rectum.
- Polyps grow slowly over many years.
- Some polyps become cancerous, others do not.

A colonoscopy is also **a safe and helpful way to look at health issues in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract**, such as:

- Belly pain that won't go away.
- Rectal pain that won't go away.
- Blood in your stool.
- Change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea (loose stool), that won't go away.
- Inflamed (swollen) colon that is seen on a computerized tomography (CT) scan.

During a colonoscopy, **tools can be passed through the colonoscope**, which is a long, thin (about the width of your little finger), flexible tube with a tiny camera and a light on the end, **to painlessly remove a suspicious-looking growth or to biopsy** (take a small tissue sample).



Colon Cancer

- Cancer of the colon and rectum — called colorectal cancer (CRC) — occurs when a growth on the lining of the colon or rectum has become cancerous.
- **CRC is the third most common cause of cancer in both men and women.** It is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.
- **CRC can be prevented**, especially when found early.
- A colonoscopy can find and treat colon cancer.
- **CRC screening should start at age 50 for average-risk individuals.**

