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What are the different types of tests that someone could use to screen for colorectal cancer?

Any screening is better than no screening at all. And oftentimes, patients are intimidated by the experience of colonoscopy. They've heard horror stories. You only need to watch a sitcom or a comedy routine and someone always makes comments about the unpleasant nature of colonoscopies. We've come a long way. And they actually are very well tolerated by patients. But there are other ways, today, to screen for colorectal cancer other than colonoscopy.

One of the tests is called a FIT test. And a FIT test is a test which examines for hemoglobin, which is, essentially, a component of blood, in a patient's stool. And it is a very easy test to undergo because you are able to do this at home in the convenience of your own home with no down time. You submit a small stool sample. And it is mailed in. And it is evaluated for a breakdown in blood products, such as hemoglobin.

Current literature supports that if a positive FIT test is obtained, the patient should undergo a colonoscopy within 90 days of that positive test.

The other test that is commonly used for colorectal cancer screening is a FIT DNA test. And this is the test that people probably have seen advertised in between sitcoms and football games. It's called Cologuard. This test, once again, has the ease and convenience of being done at home. So you avoid all the unnecessary downtime pre and post colonoscopy.

The difference with this test and the FIT test is that you have to submit an entire stool sample. So the FIT test is just a very small amount of stool that you submit to the clinic or lab, whereas the Cologuard test, you need to submit an entire bowel movement to the clinic or lab.

The way that this test works is it detects for hemoglobin in your stool but, more importantly, it checks for abnormal DNA, methylated DNA, which we see in colon cancers, will show up in this stool study. So once again, this test is a very good test. It has a high sensitivity of picking up colon cancer. Not as good at picking up large polyps. But a very good test.

And once again, our goal is to get people screened. Not every screening modality fits every patient. Now, the screening interval for this test is every three years. Once again, as with the standard FIT test, if this test is positive, you need to undergo a colonoscopy.

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