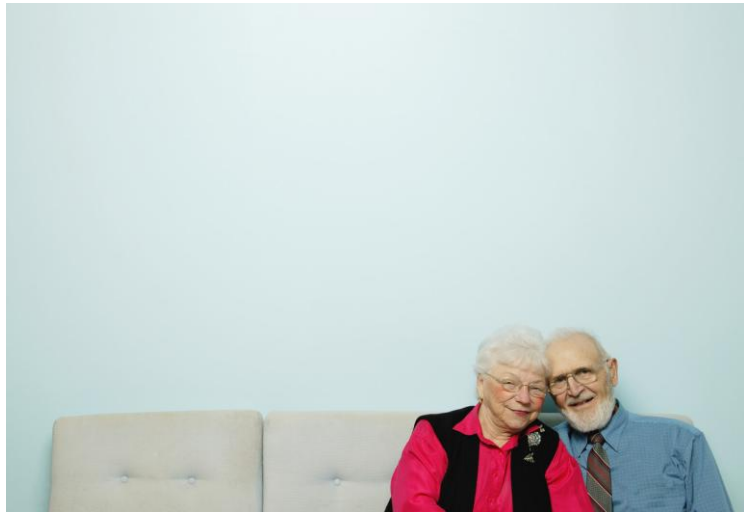


# Making a Decision about Colon Cancer Screening



## Introduction

The American Cancer Society recommends older adults age 75 and over decide whether or not to get screened for colon cancer (cancer of your bowels).

This Decision Aid will help you think about whether getting screened for colon cancer is the right choice for you.



## Information about Colon Cancer Screening

Colon cancer screening tests look for colon cancer before you have symptoms.

This decision aid is not for you if you have a personal history of colon cancer, inflammatory bowel disease or are already experiencing symptoms such as:

- bleeding from your bowels
- change in your bowel movements
- abdominal pain

If you are experiencing these symptoms, please talk to your doctor.

# Two Main Types of Tests that Screen for Colon Cancer

1. *Colonoscopy*. The doctor uses a narrow, flexible tube to look at the inside of your colon. Prior to testing you will be given medication to clean out your bowels. To help you prepare on the day of the test, you will be given medication to help you relax. During the test doctor may remove polyps (abnormal growths) or collect samples of tissue or cells for examination. This test is done at a special doctor's office. It requires a period of observation and rest after it is completed.
2. *Stool Cards, also called Fecal Occult Blood Test*. This test checks for

blood in the stool. It involves placing your stool on test cards which are then returned to your doctor's office or lab where they will be checked for hidden or occult blood. This test is done at home every year.

- An important thing to remember is that if your stool cards are positive for blood you will need to have a colonoscopy. So keep this in mind as you make your decision about screening.



## Treatments People Undergo if Colon Cancer is Found

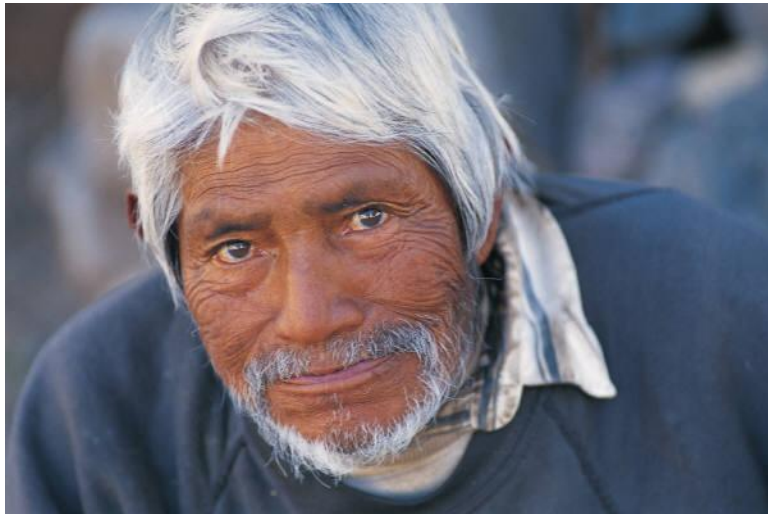
- Most people with invasive colon cancer will need surgery to remove the tumor.
- Some people may need chemotherapy after surgery.



## Colon Cancer Screening Recommendations are Different for Older Adults

- The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends that all people ages 50-75 get regular screening because screening has proven to be beneficial in this age group.
- It is different for people age 75 and older. We are not sure whether screening is beneficial for those 75 years and older. As adults get older they are more likely to encounter numerous health problems that could affect their life expectancy.

- That is why the ACS recommends that people ages 75 and older decide for themselves about colon cancer screening.



## Why do Older Adults Need to Decide for Themselves about Colon Cancer Screening?

### 1) The chances of getting a serious illness go up with increased age.

- As people get older they are more likely to develop other serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke, and other types of cancer.
- Older adults are also more likely to develop colon cancer.

### 2) Life expectancies for older adults vary with the number of serious health problems.

- On average, older people with serious health problems can be expected to

die sooner than people with fewer serious health problems.

- On average, older people without serious health problems have a better chance of living longer.

### **3) Colon cancer grows slowly.**

- In most cases colon cancer is the kind of cancer that grows slowly. If a person develops colon cancer today they may not have any problems for at least 5 and maybe as long as 10 years.

### **4) Colon cancer screening will not help all older people.**

- People probably need to have at least 5 years of life expectancy to benefit from screening.
- A person's life expectancy can be influenced by their current health condition.

### **5) Older adults must deal with competing causes of death**

- Colon cancer is just one of many serious diseases that may affect older people.
- Other serious health problems may cause other problems that lead to death before colon cancer.

### **6) There is uncertainty about who will benefit.**

- The problem is that no one can know how long any individual person will live.
- Many factors such as family history and personal lifestyle have an affect on how long any person will live.
- Each person over 75 years should make their own decision about whether colon cancer screening is right for them.

# Magnitude of potential benefit from colon cancer screening

One life is extended for every 1000 people who are screened.



# Risks to Consider in Making Your Decision about Colon Cancer Screening

1) Risk of Dying from Colon Cancer Compared to Other Common Diseases in the next 10 years

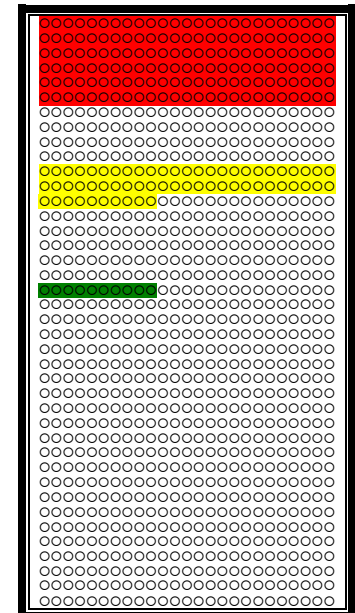
For every 1000 women age 80 there are:

150 who will die of heart disease →

60 who will die of a stroke →

10 who will die of colon cancer →

The box to the right represents 1000 women. Each O represents 1 woman.



## 2) Risks of Having Serious Complications from Colonoscopy within the first 30 days

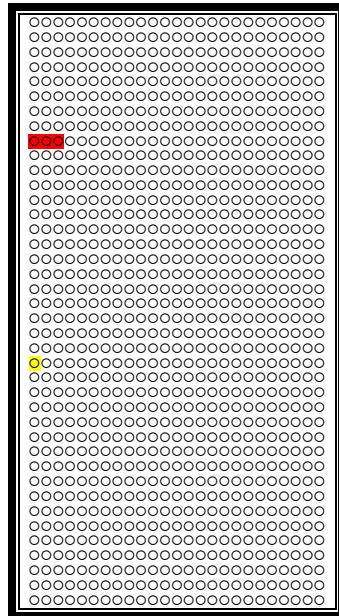
The incidence of serious complications is less than 5 out of 1000 colonoscopies.

Bleeding that required a transfusion occurred in about 3 per 1000 colonoscopies. →

Perforation or tears in the bowel that required surgery occurred in about 1 per 1000 colonoscopies. →

Death directly from complications occurred in less than 1 per 1000 colonoscopies. →

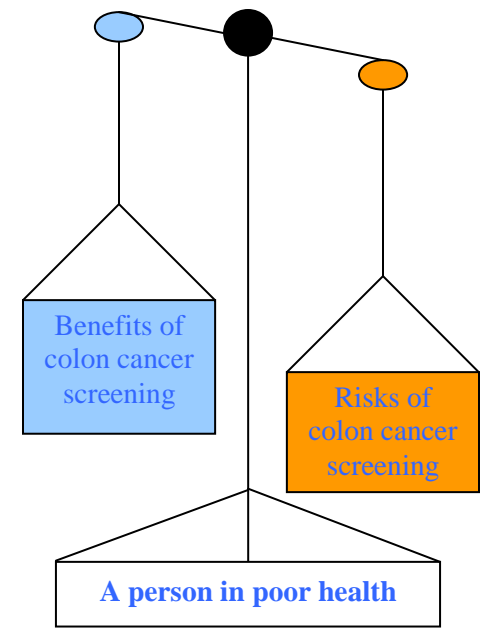
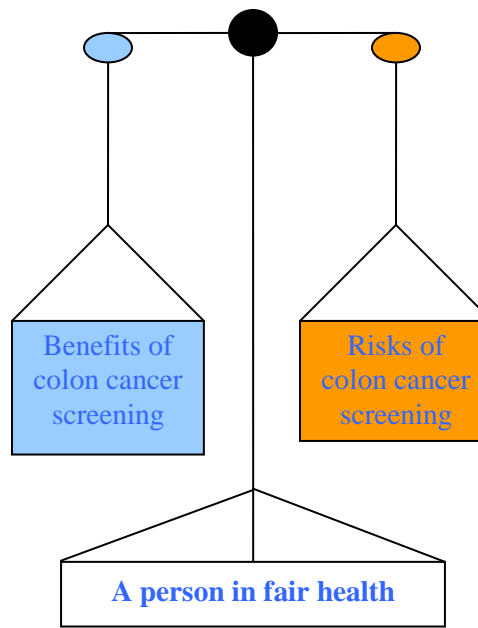
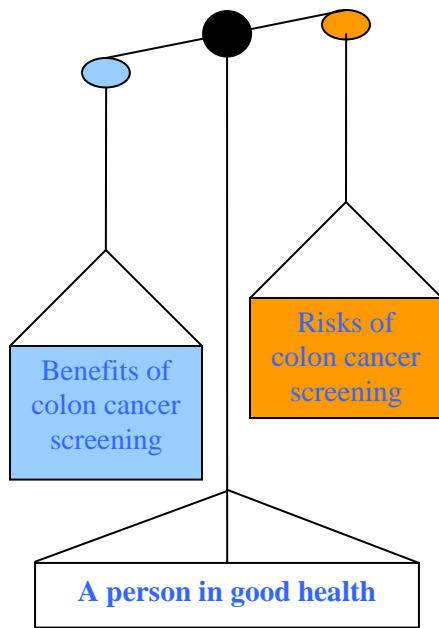
The box to the right represents 1000 women. Each ○ represents 1 woman.



## Balancing the Benefits and Risks of Colonoscopy in People age 75 and Older

Now let's examine how a person's health can influence the balance between the benefits and the risks of colon cancer screening.





A person in **good health** may be more likely to experience the potential benefits rather than the risks of colon cancer screening. This is because they are more likely to live 5 years or more and benefit from screening if they develop cancer.

For a person in **fair health** it is difficult to know whether they will live at least 5 years to experience either the benefits or risks of colon cancer screening.

A person in **poor health** may be more likely to experience the potential risks rather than the benefits of colon cancer screening. This is because they are less likely to live 5 years and benefit from screening.

You have reached the end of the Decision Aid booklet. Next, we will go over various statements that may influence your decision on whether or not to seek colon cancer screening.

Hand the Decision Aid booklet to the Research Assistant and listen to the directions for the next activity.

Upon completion of the next activity you will be given one more survey to answer before your participation in the study is complete.

