What to expect
You might think a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy will hurt. But because you will be sedated, you may not feel anything. You may not even remember having the test. Many people find getting ready for these tests the hardest part.

How to prepare
Your colon needs to be clean so the doctor can see any problems. This may mean you will need to take laxatives before the test. You may also have to take an enema the morning of your test. Follow your doctor’s instructions exactly. If you have questions, ask your doctor.

What the tests are like
Colonoscopies usually take about 30 minutes. Your test could take longer if your doctor finds a growth or polyp. Some people feel pressure from the tube. The doctor will also push air into your colon to help see better. Sometimes this causes a cramping feeling.

Flexible sigmoidoscopies are similar, but only take 10 to 20 minutes. You may not need to be sedated for this test. Talk with your doctor about your options.

If you are sedated, you will feel groggy after these tests. You will need to have someone with you at the doctor’s office to help you get home afterward.

With the barium enema, you will also feel pressure when the liquid and air are pumped into the colon. You will not need to be sedated. This takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

Call MetroPlus at 1.800.303.9626 to schedule any of these screening exams with a doctor or to find a specialist.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your doctor. There may be variations in treatment that your doctor may recommend based on individual facts about you.

MetroPlus Health Plan
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MetroPlus Medicare: 1.866.986.0356 TTY: 711
MetroPlus MLTC: 1.855.355.6582 (TTY: 1.800.881.2812)

Hours of operation: Monday–Saturday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
What is colon cancer?

Colon cancer is one of the most common cancers. Both men and women are affected. It is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.

There are a few kinds of colon cancer. The most common is called “adenocarcinoma.” This makes up 95% of all colon cancers. It starts in the cells that make mucus and other fluids.

The disease causes thousands of deaths each year, but there is some good news. The number of people dying from colon cancer is falling. Why? Better screening. With screening, cancer is found earlier when it’s easier to treat. And, growths can now be removed quickly during screening.

Learning about colon cancer screening, and having your annual screening (if you are over 50 years old) can help you prevent it. If you have colon cancer, you can take steps to beat it. More than 1 million people in the U.S. have survived colon cancer.

Risk factors

Risk factors are things that make you more likely to get a certain disease. There are 2 kinds of risk factors: those you can control, and those you can’t.

Risk factors you can control:

• **Diet.** Eating red meat, like ground beef or lamb, has been linked to colon cancer. Eating processed meats, like hot dogs and deli meat, also boosts your risk.

• **Smoking.** Smoking raises your risk for almost every kind of cancer. This includes colon cancer.

• **Obesity.** People who are very overweight are more likely to get colon cancer. Add exercise to your day to reduce your risk.

Risk factors you can’t control:

• **Family history.** If you have a close family member who has colon cancer, you’re more likely to get it too.

• **Age.** Older adults are more likely to get colon cancer than younger adults. Nine out of 10 colon cancers are found after age 50.

• **Ethnic group.** African-Americans and Jews from Eastern Europe are more likely to get colon cancer.

Getting screened

Anyone can get colon cancer. That’s why everyone over age 50 should get screened. These are some of the tests your doctor can use to check for colon cancer:

**Colonoscopy.** Your doctor will use a tube with a camera to check out your rectum and colon. He or she can look for growths or bumps, called polyps. This test lets your doctor see your whole colon. If you have polyps, the doctor can take them out before they turn into cancer. This means the test can prevent cancer.

**Flexible sigmoidoscopy.** This test uses a shorter tube to look at the rectum and part of the colon. Your doctor can also find polyps and growths with this test. This test is not used as much as it was in the past.

**Double-contrast barium enema.** Liquid and air are put in the colon through the rectum. Your doctor will then take a lot of X-rays to find any larger polyps or growths. The enema helps them stand out on the X-rays.

**Fecal occult blood test.** This test checks for hidden blood in your stool. Sometimes, polyps or growths bleed during bowel movements. Blood in your stool could let your doctor know something is wrong. Your doctor will give you a small kit to take a sample at home. You will then have the sample tested.