

Abnormal Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)

Answering your questions about an abnormal FIT

An abnormal fecal immunochemical test (FIT) result means that blood was found in your stool sample. Abnormal results are common and do not mean you have or will develop cancer.

Learning that you have an abnormal FIT result may lead to a variety of feelings and raise a number of questions. First and foremost, it's important to know that an abnormal FIT result does not mean you have or will develop cancer.

About 10 to 15 per cent of people screened with FIT will have an abnormal result and will require additional testing. This does not mean that a cancer was found – the vast majority of people with an abnormal FIT result will not have cancer.

Some people with an abnormal FIT result may have polyps. Polyps are small growths that can develop in the colon or rectum, often with no symptoms in early stages of growth. Most polyps will never turn into cancer, and for those that do, it will take many years for this to happen.

What happens after an abnormal FIT?

After you receive your abnormal FIT result in the mail, you will be contacted by the health care team in your community regarding further follow-up. The health care team will assess your condition and book a colonoscopy procedure if appropriate, or let you know if other monitoring or treatment is advised.

While waiting for your follow-up, please ensure your health care provider is aware if you develop any of the following symptoms at any time:

- Blood in your stool
- Abdominal pain
- Change in bowel habits
- Unexplained weight loss

If you receive an abnormal FIT result, do not repeat the test in hopes of receiving a different result. Even if you receive a normal FIT result on a later test, the recommendation to proceed to colonoscopy would not change. The cause of the blood detected in your original sample still requires further investigation.

What you should know

- An abnormal FIT does not mean you have cancer.
- It's important to attend all follow-up appointments for tests or treatment.
- If polyps are found, most are removed during your colonoscopy.
- Colonoscopy is an important step for getting ahead of cancer in your colon.

What is colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a procedure where a physician uses a miniature camera attached to a flexible tube to view the inside lining of your colon. During the test, tissue samples can be collected and polyps removed.

If you have a personal history of adenoma(s) or a significant family history of colon cancer, your health care provider may refer you directly for colonoscopy. You may also be referred for colonoscopy following an abnormal FIT result. In both cases, the health care team in your community will discuss the procedure with you.

Why is it important that I attend my colonoscopy appointment now?

Colonoscopy can help you get ahead of cancer. An abnormal FIT result means that blood was found in your stool, and investigating the cause of the bleeding is important. Attending your scheduled colonoscopy appointment helps to minimize your risk of colon cancer.

Keeping you safe during your colonoscopy appointment	
BC Cancer Colon Screening is committed to ensuring the safety of both patients and health care providers during colonoscopy appointments:	
Before your appointment	During your appointment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The health care team in your community will contact you by phone regarding pre-colonoscopy assessment and scheduling.• Expect to be at the hospital for 2 to 3 hours on the day of your colonoscopy.• Arrange to have an adult accompany you home after your appointment. You will not be able to drive until the following day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You will be asked to change into a gown.• A nurse will complete your admission history and measure your vital signs. You will be asked to provide a list of your medications.• A nurse will start an intravenous (IV) to administer sedation and pain medication.• Your colonoscopy will begin once you are sedated.

What causes an abnormal FIT result?

The FIT is a screening test that can only detect blood in the stool. FIT is not a diagnostic test. This means that while a FIT can find one sign that may indicate cancer (blood in the stool), it cannot be used to diagnose cancer or identify why there was blood in your stool.

An abnormal FIT result simply means that blood was found in the stool sample you submitted. A FIT can only tell us that you may be bleeding from somewhere in your lower digestive tract. It cannot tell us from which part or why.

There may be a number of different reasons why blood was found in your stool, including ulcers, hemorrhoids (sometimes painless or internal), anal fissures, diverticular disease, or inflammation.

It is important that you be assessed with a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy can help find where the bleeding is coming from.

Contact Us

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Any questions regarding the collection of the information by BC Cancer can be directed to the Operations Director, Cancer Screening (address: 801 – 686 West Broadway, Vancouver BC V5Z 1G1, web: www.screeningbc.ca or email: screening@bccancer.bc.ca)

This fact sheet is also available in additional languages including French, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog, Korean, Persian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and German. To access these fact sheets, please visit: www.screeningbc.ca/colon.