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How to Get Screened for Cancer if You Don't Have a Doctor

Screening tests are used to find cancer in people who have no symptoms. Screening increases the chances of finding certain cancers early, when they are small, have not spread, and might be easier to treat.

You might be getting to, or you might be at the age when you need to start screening. Or you might be overdue for your screening tests because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, many elective medical procedures were put on hold, and this led to fewer people getting screened for cancer.

Getting your cancer screenings

Some cancer screening tests need to be ordered by a doctor or another health care provider who can order them. If you don't have a doctor, there are things you can do and places you can call to find out how to get the screening tests you need. Here is information about recommended cancer screening tests and other information you might need to know so you can get screened.

Breast cancer screening

Screening for breast cancer is done with a [mammogram](#)¹. Some communities have different facilities where you can get a mammogram while others may only have a limited number of places to choose from. Some facilities will want you to have a doctor's order for your mammogram and will want you to schedule an appointment to get screened. Other facilities might tell you a doctor's order is not needed, and you can just walk in to get a mammogram.

If you need to get screened for breast cancer and you don't have a doctor, try calling a

local hospital, medical clinic, or woman's clinic. You can also call your [local health department](#)² or a facility that does mammograms. When you call, explain your situation, and ask if you are eligible for any programs that offer breast cancer screening without having a primary doctor or a doctor's order. There might also be mobile mammography units that drive the mammogram machine to your neighborhood at certain times to offer breast cancer screening services. [If you don't have health insurance](#)³, there may be free or low-cost breast cancer screening programs available. Sometimes, hospitals or clinics might host free cancer screening events. If you have health insurance, you can check with your insurance company to find out if there are mammogram facilities or doctors listed in the plan where you can go for screening or get an order for a mammogram.

Learn more about the [American Cancer Society's guidelines for breast cancer screening](#)⁴ in American Cancer Society Recommendations for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer. If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening](#).⁵

Cervical cancer screening

Screening for cervical cancer is done by a doctor or nurse who is trained to do a pelvic exam. A specialist, called a gynecologist, can also do cervical cancer screenings.

During the pelvic exam, either an [HPV test, combined HPV and Pap test, or Pap test](#)⁶ alone is done as a screening test. Some communities have different facilities where you can get screened for cervical cancer while others may only have a limited number of places to choose from. Most facilities will want you to schedule an appointment to get screened.

If you need to get screened for cervical cancer and you don't have a doctor, try calling a local hospital, medical clinic, or woman's clinic. You can also call your local health department. When you explain your situation, they can help you figure out how you can get screened. [If you don't have health insurance](#)⁷, there might be free or low-cost programs available or clinics where you can get screened for cervical cancer without having a primary doctor. Sometimes, hospitals or clinics might host free cancer screening events. If you have health insurance, you can check with your insurance company to find out if there are facilities or doctors listed in the plan where you can go for screening.

Learn more about the American Cancer Society's guidelines for cervical cancer screening in [The American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Prevention and Early Detection of Cervical Cancer](#)⁸. If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening](#).⁹

Colorectal cancer screening

There are several [test options for colorectal cancer screening](#).¹⁰

- Stool-based testing looks at your stool (poop) for signs of cancer. These can be done at home because you collect a sample of your stool (poop) and follow instructions to mail it in to be tested. A doctor's office or medical clinic can provide take-home stool tests, and some pharmacies and online stores sell stool tests. Depending on the results of a stool test, you might need to have other tests.
- Visual exams look at the inside of the colon and rectum with a scope (colonoscopy) or special imaging test (colonography) to look for cancer or other problems. These tests are done in health care facilities that have special equipment to do them. You will need a doctor's order for one of these tests and might need to see a specialist (such as a gastroenterologist or colorectal surgeon) to have the test.

If you need to get screened for colorectal cancer and you don't have a doctor, try calling a local hospital, medical clinic, or your local health department. When you explain your situation, they can help you figure out how you can get screened. There might be programs available or clinics where you can get screened without having a primary doctor. If you [don't have health insurance](#)¹¹, there might be free or low-cost programs available or clinics where you can get screened for colorectal cancer without having a primary doctor. Sometimes, hospitals or clinics might host free cancer screening events. If you have health insurance, you can call your insurance company to find out if there are doctors or facilities listed in the plan where you can go for colorectal cancer screening.

Learn more about the American Cancer Society's guidelines for colorectal cancer screening in [American Cancer Society Guidelines for Colorectal Cancer Screening](#)¹². If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening](#).¹³

Lung Cancer Screening

Lung cancer screening is done using a [low-dose CAT scan or CT scan \(LDCT\)](#)¹⁴. This test should be done in a facility that has the right type of CT scan machine and experience in screening people for lung cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends [people with a higher risk of getting lung cancer](#)¹⁵ talk to a doctor or health care provider about the risks and benefits of lung cancer screening before making the decision to get screened.

If you choose to get screened for lung cancer and you don't have a doctor, call a local hospital, medical clinic, or health department. When you explain your situation, they might be able to guide you to a facility that does the screening test or to a clinic or doctor that can help. Some communities or hospitals offer mobile lung cancer screening units, but most LDCT scans are done in a hospital or imaging facility.

If you decide lung cancer screening is right for you, and [you don't have health insurance](#)¹⁶, there might be free or low-cost programs or clinics available. Sometimes, hospitals or clinics might host free cancer screening events. If you have health insurance, you can check with your insurance company to find out if there are facilities that offer lung cancer screening or doctors you can see in your plan so you can get a screening test scheduled.

Learn more about the American Cancer Society's guidelines for lung cancer screening in [Can Lung Cancer Be Found Early?](#)¹⁷. If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening.](#)¹⁸

Prostate cancer screening

Prostate cancer screening is done using the [prostate-specific antigen \(PSA\) blood test with or without a rectal exam](#)¹⁹. The American Cancer Society recommends talking to a doctor or health care provider about the risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening before making the decision to get screened.

If you choose to get screened for prostate cancer and don't have a doctor, try calling a local hospital, medical clinic, or health department. When you explain your situation, they might be able to guide you to a facility that does the screening test or to a clinic or doctor that can help. [If you don't have health insurance](#)²⁰, there might be free or low-cost programs or clinics available. Sometimes, hospitals or clinics might host free cancer screening events. If you have health insurance, you can check with your insurance company to find out if there are facilities that offer prostate cancer screening or doctors you can see in your plan so you can get a screening test scheduled.

Learn more about the American Cancer Society's guidelines for prostate cancer screening in [American Cancer Society Recommendations for Prostate Cancer Early Detection](#)²¹. If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening.](#)²²

Finding a doctor to help you get screened for cancer

If you don't have a doctor or health care provider, keep in mind that some cancer screening tests might require a doctor's order. If you're told you need a doctor's order or a referral from a doctor, it's a good idea to find a doctor or health care provider who can order the tests you need and help you schedule them. Or, maybe you just want to find a doctor who you can see on a regular basis to help monitor your cancer risk factors and remind you about the screenings you need.

If you don't have a doctor, choosing one can be overwhelming and can take a lot of time. If you have health insurance, your insurance company likely has a list of doctors you can choose from. Some people might simply ask family and friends for names of doctors they have seen. Others might look for a doctor near their home or one they can get to easily. Some people might start by finding a hospital first, and then looking for a doctor who practices or has an office in or near that hospital. If you're not sure where to start, you might want to try calling local hospitals or your local health department. Sometimes they have medical clinics where people can go to see a doctor and get the tests they need.

No matter how you go about looking for a doctor, the most important thing is to find and establish care with one who best fits your needs. When choosing a doctor, you will likely need to look for a clinic or office that has a primary care physician (PCP) or a family doctor (sometimes also called a generalist, internist, or internal medicine doctor). Some women may feel more comfortable with a gynecologist as their primary doctor. Many clinics and offices also have nurse practitioners or physician assistants who can recommend and order cancer screening tests.

Once you find a clinic or doctor, you will need to set up a new patient appointment during which your cancer risk factors and overall health status will be assessed. Then the doctor or provider can recommend the cancer screening tests that are right for you, you can decide together which tests to get, and then find out where and how to get them.

The doctor's office or clinic or facility where you had the test will notify you of the results of your screening tests. This might happen by phone, email, or mail depending on the type of test and results. If any of your screening test results show possible signs of cancer, you will have a follow-up appointment and the doctor will recommend the next steps and refer you to the proper specialist if one is needed.

Checking with your insurance company

If you have health insurance, call your insurance company to see which doctors are covered by your insurance. If you have found a doctor you like, check with your

insurance company to see if they are covered in your plan. You might also want to call their office and ask if they're on your health insurance plan and are taking new patients. If a doctor you like is not within your insurance network, ask your insurance company how much it might cost you to see that doctor.

Find out if you will be responsible for any costs, such as a copay for office visits. Also ask your insurance company if your cancer screening tests and follow-up appointments will be covered fully or if you will have a copay.

If you don't have health insurance and you need to get a screening test, learn about [Costs and Insurance Coverage for Cancer Screening Tests](#)²³. If you're not sure what questions to ask when you call a facility or talk to a doctor for more information, you can check out [Questions to Ask a Doctor About Cancer Screening](#).²⁴

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/screening-tests-and-early-detection/mammograms.html
2. www.usa.gov/state-health
3. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-costs-insurance-coverage.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/screening-tests-and-early-detection/american-cancer-society-recommendations-for-the-early-detection-of-breast-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/questions-to-ask-your-doctor-about-cancer-screening.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/screening-tests.html
7. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-costs-insurance-coverage.html
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9. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/questions-to-ask-your-doctor-about-cancer-screening.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/screening-tests-used.html
11. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-costs-insurance-coverage.html
12. [6](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/acs-</div><div data-bbox=)

- [recommendations.html](#)
13. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/questions-to-ask-your-doctor-about-cancer-screening.html
 14. www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/how-diagnosed.html
 15. www.cancer.org/cancer/lung-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/detection.html
 16. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-costs-insurance-coverage.html
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NIH National Institute on Aging. How to Choose a Doctor You Can Talk To. Accessed at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/how-choose-doctor-you-can-talk> on April 21, 2021.

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