

Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) What You Should Know



Fecal Occult Blood Tests are:

Economical – FOBTs are the cheapest colon cancer screening method

Accessible – FOBTs are non-invasive, they can be performed at home and mailed to the lab.

Simple – It takes about 5 minutes over 3 days to give you peace of mind

Yearly – The most effective FOBT method is performed yearly

A fecal occult blood test (FOBT) is a noninvasive test that detects the presence of hidden (occult) blood in the stool. Such blood may arise from anywhere along the digestive tract. Hidden blood in stool is often the first, and in many cases the only, warning sign that a person has colorectal disease, including colon cancer.



There are two types of FOBTs: 1) the traditional smear test, and 2) the newer, flushable pads. The flushable pads are not useful for detecting hidden blood in the stool for the purposes of screening for colon cancer and polyps. Therefore, this test is not available through the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program. The traditional smear test is completed and read by a lab, and these tests are usually available from a lab, doctor's office, or the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program.

How and Why the test is performed?

A fecal occult blood test detects blood in the stool by placing a small sample of stool on a chemically treated card, pad, or wipe; then a chemical developer solution is put on top of the sample. If the card, pad, or cloth turns blue, there is blood in the stool.

This test is mainly performed for colorectal cancer screening. It may also be performed in the evaluation of anemia.

Advantages	Disadvantages:
Non-Invasive	Detects blood in stool, but not its cause
Low cost	False-positive results are common with some testing methods and may cause unwarranted anxiety about cancer and lead to unnecessary further tests.
	False-negative results are also common and may miss a cancer or polyp in its early stages.

What are the test results?

Normal Values:

A "negative" test result is usual and is normal.

Abnormal Values:

Positive test results may indicate the following:

- Bleeding esophageal varices
- Colon polyp or colon cancer
- Esophagitis
- Gastritis
- GI (gastrointestinal) trauma
- GI tumor
- Hemorrhoids
- Fissures
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Peptic ulcer
- Complications of recent GI surgery
- Angiodysplasia of the colon

Note that false positives are not uncommon. A false positive test is one that shows blood in the stool without an important or dangerous reason for the blood being there.

Additional conditions under which the test may be performed include the following:

- Colon cancer screening
- Evaluation of anemia

A negative test does not necessarily mean there are no colorectal diseases present. Not all polyps and cancers bleed, and not all polyps and cancers bleed all the time. That is why it is so important to continue to screen each year for colon cancer.

Additional Resources

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program

www.hhss.ne.gov/crc

Beckman Coulter

www.beckman-coulter.com

For More Information:

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