

Colonoscopy

What Is A Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a special test that allows your doctor to inspect the lining of your lower gastrointestinal (GI) tract, or rectum and colon. In order to see these areas, your doctor will insert a long, flexible, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera attached to it (colonoscope), through your anus and into the rectum and colon. During the test, tissue can be biopsied from any area that looks abnormal and polyps, or abnormal growths, can be removed.

The procedure can either be done in a hospital or at an outpatient center.

Why Do I Need A Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is an important screening test for colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the US. While most people have a colonoscopy as part of routine cancer screening, it may also be used to evaluate any of the following:

- Blood in your stool
- Rectal bleeding
- Changes in bowel habits
- Persistent abdominal pain
- Follow up of an abnormal result from a CT scan, MRI, barium enema, or stool test
- Iron deficiency anemia (low blood count because of low iron)



How Do I Prepare For A Colonoscopy?

Your colon must be completely cleaned out before you have a colonoscopy. This gives your doctor the best chance of finding any abnormal areas that you may have in your colon. To clean your colon, your doctor will give you a laxative regimen to take at home before your test, along with specific instructions to follow about how to take it. The laxative will cause significant watery diarrhea, so you will need to remain close to a bathroom after you take it.

Also, it is common for your doctor to ask you to limit your diet to clear liquids (water, clear juice, clear broth, etc.) the day before your test. You will then need to stop drinking anything 6 to 8 hours before your procedure, unless your doctor instructs you otherwise.

While most medications are safe to take before your test, you may be asked to stop taking certain medications. In order for your doctor to decide if any of your medications need to be stopped, it is essential that you let them know all of the medications you are taking, including supplements and herbal remedies.

You won't be able to drive yourself home after the colonoscopy, so it is important that you have someone go with you to the outpatient center or hospital.

If you think you could be pregnant you need to notify your doctor before the colonoscopy.

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What Can I Expect During A Colonoscopy?

Before your colonoscopy, your doctor will review your medical history and all of the medications you are taking. The procedure will be explained to you and you will be asked to sign a consent form allowing your doctor to perform the colonoscopy. If you have any questions about the test now is the time to ask them.

You will also have an IV started that allows your doctor to give you light sedation and medication to prevent pain. If your procedure is expected to be long or complex, you may have an anesthesiologist give you heavy sedation.

When you are taken into the procedure room, you will be asked to lie on your side with your knees pulled up to your abdomen. Once your doctor starts the test, you are likely to be asleep and you won't feel anything. If you do notice anything, you may feel like you need to have a bowel movement when the scope is put in. You may also notice some cramping.

The entire test usually takes less than an hour.

What Can I Expect Immediately Following A Colonoscopy?

After your colonoscopy, you will be monitored in the recovery area until your sedation wears off. You are likely to feel tired and have problems concentrating for the rest of the day. Because of this, it is recommended that you go home and rest until you feel back to your normal self.

You may feel a bit bloated or have crampy gas pains that are relieved by passing gas but this should go away pretty quickly. If you had a biopsy or a polyp was removed, you may notice traces of blood in your stool for a few days.

You should be able to eat shortly after the procedure is finished, but your doctor may limit your diet and activities for a few days, depending on how the procedure went.

When you are sent home, you will be given a list of instructions on how to care for yourself after the colonoscopy. It is important to follow these instructions.

How Long Will It Take To Get The Results Of The Procedure?

Some of the results from your colonoscopy will be available right away. Once your sedation has worn off, your doctor will discuss the results of the procedure with you. However, you

may not remember the conversation very well because of the sedation, so you may want a friend or family member to hear the results too.

If you had a biopsy taken or a polyp removed, the doctor will send the tissue to the laboratory for an examination. These results can take a few days or more to come back. Once your doctor has a chance to review the results, they may call you to discuss the results or ask you to schedule an appointment to discuss what needs to be done next.

What Are The Complications Of A Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a safe procedure and serious complications are rare. Complications that can occur are infection or bleeding. Rarely, a small hole or tear in the rectum or colon can occur that requires immediate surgery to repair. Some people may have a reaction to a medication used during the procedure.

You should call your doctor right away if you experience any of the following:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Fever greater than 100.4 F
- Rectal bleeding
- Vomiting

Where Can You Get More Information About Colonoscopy?

- **American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy**
<https://www.asge.org/home/for-patients/patient-information/understanding-colonoscopy>
- **Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons**
<https://www.sages.org/publications/patient-information/patient-information-for-colonoscopy-from-sages/>
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests/colonoscopy>