



## ERCP (endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography)

### What Is An ERCP?

An ERCP is a special test that is used to look at your bile ducts and pancreatic duct. These ducts bring bile and pancreatic juices, which are used to digest your food, from your liver, gallbladder, and pancreas to your small intestine.

In order to see these ducts, your doctor will insert a flexible, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera attached to it (endoscope), through your mouth, esophagus, and stomach into the upper part of your small intestine (duodenum). Once in the duodenum, your doctor will look for the small opening of the main duct. A small narrow plastic tube is then inserted through the endoscope and into this duct opening. This allows for a special dye to be injected into the ducts and an x-ray to be taken, allowing your doctor to see the ducts and to look for any area that looks abnormal.

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

### Why Do I Need An ERCP?

An ERCP is done if your doctor suspects you have a problem with your bile ducts or pancreatic duct based on the symptoms you are having. This test can find blockages of the ducts, abnormal tissue, problems with bile flow or the flow of pancreatic fluid, gallstones in the ducts, or tumors. It can also be used to treat many of these problems or to take a biopsy of any abnormal area.

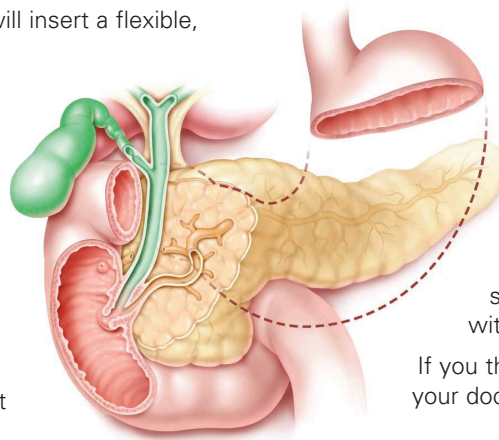
### How Do I Prepare For An ERCP?

It is important that your stomach is empty for your ERCP, so you will be asked to stop eating and drinking anything 6 to 8 hours before your procedure.

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, 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 ERCP.



### What Can I Expect During An ERCP?

Before your ERCP, 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 ERCP. If you have any questions about the test now is the time to ask them.

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You will also have an IV started that will allow your doctor to give you light sedation and medication to prevent pain. If needed, a local anesthetic may be applied to your throat before the ERCP. 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 stomach on an x-ray table. Once your doctor starts the test, you may feel some bloating from the air that the endoscope pumps into your stomach but you shouldn't feel anything painful.

The entire process usually takes about 1 to 2 hours.

## What Can I Expect Immediately Following An ERCP?

After your ERCP, 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 but this should go away pretty quickly. You may also have a sore throat for a day or two after the procedure.

Once you can swallow normally, you should be able to start eating a regular diet.

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

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

Some of the results from your ERCP 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, the doctor will send the tissue to the laboratory for an examination. The biopsy results can take a few days or more to come back.

## What Are The Complications Of An ERCP?

An ERCP is a safe procedure and serious complications are rare. Complications that can occur are pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas), infection of the bile ducts, and bleeding. Rarely, a small hole or tear in the intestine can occur that requires immediate surgery to repair. Some people may have a reaction to a medication used or to the dye.

The risks of the ERCP depend upon why the test is being performed and any interventions that your doctor needs to do during the procedure. Your doctor will discuss the chances that a complication will occur before you have the test.

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

- Severe abdominal pain
- Chest pain
- Fever greater than 100.4 F
- Problems breathing
- Bloody or black stools
- Problems swallowing or throat pain that is getting worse
- Vomiting

## Where Can You Get More Information About ERCP?

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

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