

Colonoscopy Information

The Procedure: Colonoscopy is an outpatient procedure done to visually evaluate the colon or large intestine. After a colon preparation the day before the procedure, and under intravenous sedation, a colonoscope is inserted through the rectum into the colon so that the inside of the colon may be examined. Sometimes colonoscopy is used to screen the colon for disease, especially in higher risk patients such as those with a strong family history of colon cancer. Sometimes it is used to further evaluate abnormalities seen on x-rays, such as barium enema or CT scan. Usually you are quite sleepy during the procedure, which is done either on your left side or on your back. Some people experience mild discomfort or cramping during the procedure. After the exam is completed, you will go to the recovery room for a brief observation period and then released home with a responsible person who must drive for you.

Biopsy and Polypectomy: If your doctor sees any suspicious or abnormal areas, they may take a small sample (biopsy) of that area with an instrument passed through the scope. Additionally, if abnormal growths of colon lining (colon polyps) are found, these may be removed through the scope using either a type of forceps or a wire snare device. Electrocautery (low power electrical current) may be used to sever the polyp from the intestinal wall to prevent bleeding. Some, but not all types of polyps, may contain or have the potential to develop cancer, therefore it is important to identify and remove these growths. Usually any tissue removed during the exam is sent to the lab for pathologic examination.

Preparation for Exam: Inform your doctor before the examination of any allergies you have to medicines. If you are on blood thinners, (such as Coumadin, Plavix, Eliquis) you will be instructed to stop the medicine before the procedure. You will cleanse your bowel by means of an oral preparation the day before. A separate set of instructions for the preparation will be given to you. Make sure you have someone to drive you home after the procedure; you will not be allowed to drive yourself home.

Possible Complications: Colonoscopy is usually a safe and well tolerated procedure, however as with any invasive procedure, there are risks and possible complications associated with it, especially if a polypectomy is performed. Occasionally people have pain for a few days afterwards. Bleeding sometimes occurs where tissue has been removed either from a biopsy or polypectomy. This usually stops on its own without further intervention, but occasionally re-scoping or surgery might be required to control it. A rare complication is that of perforation of the wall of the colon which can cause leakage of intestinal fluid into the abdominal cavity. This situation requires intravenous fluids, antibiotics and usually surgical intervention.

Follow-Up After Colonoscopy: When you leave the hospital after your exam you will be given instructions on how and when to follow-up with your doctor. You may need to call the office for results or to schedule an appointment. Based on the findings, from the exam and those of the pathologist, you will be instructed when a follow-up colonoscopy is suggested. While not all patients will need a follow-up exam, many do, especially those who have had abnormal biopsies, polyps removed or those with a strong family history of colon cancer. Also, patients who are followed for inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) may need periodic re-examination.

All patients are urged to contact the office at any time before or after colonoscopy with any questions or concerns they might have regarding the preparation, exam or aftercare, including questions about insurance coverage.

A copy of your colonoscopy report and pathology report if applicable will be forwarded to your primary care provider for their records.