

Frequently Asked Questions About a Colonoscopy

What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a procedure that enables an examiner (gastroenterologist) to evaluate the inside of the colon (large intestine or large bowel). The colonoscope is a flexible tube about the thickness of a finger with a camera and tiny light source at its tip. The lubricated colonoscope is carefully inserted into the anus and advanced, under visual control, into the rectum and through the colon as far as the cecum (the first part of the colon).

A colonoscopy is done for several reasons such as: screening for colon cancer, family history of colonic abnormalities or cancer, investigate blood in the stool, abdominal pain, diarrhea, a change in bowel habits or an abnormal test. During the colonoscopy, if the doctor sees something that may be abnormal, tiny amounts of tissue can be removed for analysis (called a biopsy), and abnormal growths, or polyps, can be identified and removed. In many cases, a colonoscopy allows accurate diagnosis and treatment without the need for a major operation.

What can I expect while preparing for a colonoscopy?

The colonoscopy prep process is one of the most important steps in a successful exam. If the colon is not emptied adequately it will influence the quality of the colonoscopy. Before a colonoscopy, you'll need to clean out (empty) your colon because any residue in your colon can obscure the view of your colon and rectum during the exam.

To empty your colon, you will be given an oral preparation. Some preparations can be found over-the-counter; however, some will require a prescription. During the preparation process you will experience nausea, bloating, explosive liquid stools, cramping and frequent trips to the bathroom. Laxatives may cause these symptoms as well.

You won't be able to eat solid food the day before the exam after 9 a.m. It is important to remain hydrated during the preparation process. Drinks are limited to clear liquids such as: plain water, tea and coffee without milk or cream, broth, and carbonated beverages. Avoid red or purple liquids, which can be confused with blood during the colonoscopy. **You will not be able to drink anything 3 hours prior to your procedure. If you consume liquids 3 hours before your procedure or foods after 9 a.m. the day before your procedure, your procedure will be rescheduled for your safety.**

What can I expect during a colonoscopy?

The colonoscopy is performed by a doctor experienced in the procedure and lasts approximately 15-30 minutes. You will be asked to lie on your left side on the examining table. Medications will be given into your vein to make you feel relaxed and drowsy. During a colonoscopy, the doctor uses a colonoscope, a long, flexible, tubular instrument about 1/2-inch in diameter that transmits an image of the lining of the colon so the doctor can examine it for any abnormalities. The doctor will do a rectal exam prior to inserting the colonoscope.

The scope bends, so the doctor can move it around the curves of your colon. The scope also blows air into your colon, which expands the colon and helps the doctor see more clearly. When the doctor has finished, the colonoscope is slowly withdrawn while the lining of your bowel is carefully examined.

What are possible complications from a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy poses few risks and is a safe procedure. Rare complications of a colonoscopy may include:

- Adverse reaction to the medication used during the exam such as difficulty breathing
- Bleeding from the site where a tissue sample (biopsy) was taken or a polyp or other abnormal tissue was removed. Heavy bleeding (hemorrhage) may require a blood transfusion or reinsertion of the colonoscope to control bleeding.
- A tear in the colon (perforation) which may require surgical repair
- Although a detailed examination is done there is a small chance that large polyps or small colon cancers are missed.

Remember to always discuss concerns you may have about the procedure with you doctor.

Information retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/colorectal-cancer/colonoscopy-what-you-need-to-know#1>
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/colonoscopy/basics/risks/prc-20013624>

