

COLONOSCOPY

A colonoscopy is a test that looks at the inside lining of a person's large intestine (the colon). Colonoscopy is performed for a variety of reasons. Most people have a colonoscopy as a screening test to check for cancer in the colon or rectum. People can also have a colonoscopy if they have any of the symptoms listed below. Cancer screening tests are tests that are done to try and find cancer early, before a person has symptoms. Cancer that is found early is usually small and can be cured or easily treated.

Doctors recommend that most Caucasian, Hispanic and Asian patients begin having colon cancer screening at age 50, and African American patients at the age of 45. Some people have an increased chance of getting colon cancer, because of a strong family history or certain medical conditions. These people should begin screening at a younger age. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned that you may need earlier screening.

In addition to screening for cancer, your doctor might recommend a colonoscopy if you have:

- Blood in your bowel movements
- A change in your bowel habits
- A condition called anemia that can make you feel tired and weak
- Long-term belly or rectal pain that you cannot explain
- Abnormal results from a different type of colon test
- A history of colon cancer or growths in your colon

COLONOSCOPY PREPARATION

Your doctor will give you instructions about what to do before a colonoscopy. He or she will tell you what foods you can and cannot eat. He or she will also tell you if you need to stop taking any of your usual medicines beforehand.

The colon needs to be cleaned out before a colonoscopy. Your doctor will give you a laxative that causes watery diarrhea. Let your doctor know if you have trouble getting ready for your colonoscopy.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING COLONOSCOPY

During the procedure, you will be put to sleep and monitored by an anesthesiologist. A thin tube with a camera and light at the tip will be inserted into your anus and advanced through the colon. Your doctor will look at the inside lining of the whole colon.

During the procedure, your doctor might take a biopsy of the colon or remove polyps, which are small growths that may one day turn into cancer. After the procedure, your doctor will provide you with a copy of the report and information regarding what occurred during the procedure.

COLONOSCOPY RECOVERY

After the colonoscopy, you will be observed while the sedative medication wears off. The medicines cause most people to temporarily feel tired or have difficulty concentrating and you should not drive or return to work after the procedure. We recommend that you have an escort help you get home after the procedure.

The most common discomfort after the examination is a feeling of bloating as a result of the air introduced during the examination. This usually resolves quickly. Most patients are able to eat shortly after the examination.

COLONOSCOPY COMPLICATIONS

Complications are uncommon, but include:

- Perforation (creating a tear in the colon), which is very rare. If this occurs, surgery may be required to repair the tear.
- If a polyp is seen and removed, bleeding can occur for up to 10 days after the procedure. It is important to watch for signs of significant bleeding for a few days after the procedure.
- Risk from sedation and anesthesia, but these are also very rare. It is important to tell your physician if you have had any complications related to anesthesia in the past.

Call your doctor or nurse immediately if you have any of the following problems after your colonoscopy:

- Belly pain that is much worse than gas pain or cramps
- A bloated and hard belly
- Vomiting
- Fever
- A lot of bleeding from your anus

AFTER COLONOSCOPY

Most patients tolerate colonoscopy very well and feel fine afterwards. Some fatigue is common after the examination, and you should plan to take it easy and relax the rest of the day.

The endoscopist can describe the result of their examination before you leave the endoscopy unit. If biopsies have been taken or polyps removed, you should call for results within one to two weeks.