



➤ COLONOSCOPY

What is Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy allows the physician to look inside the entire large intestine or colon. The doctor will insert a long, flexible, lighted tube about the size of your finger into your rectum and slowly guide it into your colon. The tube is called a colonoscope (koh-LON-oh-sko-pe). The colonoscope transmits an image of the inside of the colon onto a video screen so the doctor can carefully examine the lining of the colon. The colonoscope is relatively thin and flexible and bends so the doctor can move it around the curves of your colon.

This procedure enables the physician to see things such as inflamed tissue, abnormal growths, and ulcers. It is most often used to look for early signs of cancer in the colon and rectum. It is also used to look for causes of unexplained changes in bowel habits and to evaluate symptoms like abdominal pain, rectal bleeding and weight loss.

What Preparation is Required for the Procedure?

You will be given instructions in advance that will explain what you need to do to prepare for your colonoscopy. A thorough cleansing of the bowel is necessary before a colonoscopy. There are several different preparations and your physician will review the options. You may be asked to follow a liquid diet for 1 day beforehand. You will likely be asked to take a laxative the night before the procedure. In some cases you may be asked to give yourself an enema. An enema is sometimes performed by inserting a bottle with a solution in your rectum to clean out the bowels. Your doctor will tell you exactly what cleansing routine to use.

The medical staff will also want to know if you have heart disease, lung disease, or any medical condition that may need special attention. You must also arrange for someone to take you home afterward, because you will not be allowed to drive after being sedated. As always, it is important to follow your physician's instructions very carefully.

What Can I Expect During a Colonoscopy?

For the colonoscopy, you will lie on an exam table on your left side. You will be given a moderate sedative to keep you comfortable and help you relax during the exam. The physician and a nurse will monitor your vital signs, look for any signs of discomfort, and make adjustments as needed.

The doctor will then insert the colonoscope and examine the lining of the colon. You may be asked to change positions at times so the doctor can move the scope to better visualize the different parts of your colon. The scope blows air into your colon and inflates it, which helps give the physician a better view.

*Content derived from the National Digestive Disease Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) & the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.

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During the procedure you may feel mild cramping. You can reduce the cramping by taking several slow, deep breaths. When the doctor has finished, the colonoscope is slowly withdrawn while the lining of your bowel is carefully examined and most of the air is removed.

What if an Abnormality is Found During the Colonoscopy?

If your doctor finds an area that needs further evaluation, your physician may take a biopsy to be analyzed by an expert gastrointestinal pathologist. Biopsies are used to identify many conditions, and your doctor may take one even if he or she doesn't suspect cancer.

What Happens After a Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy usually takes 15 to 30 minutes. The sedative and pain medicine should keep you from feeling much discomfort during the exam. You may feel some cramping or the sensation of having gas after the procedure is completed, but it usually stops within an hour.

What are Possible Complications of a Colonoscopy?

Complications such as bleeding or perforation are rare, but it is important for you to recognize early signs of them. Rarely, people experience severe abdominal pain, fever, bloody bowel movements, dizziness, or weakness after a colonoscopy. If you have any of these side effects, contact your physician immediately. Read your discharge instructions carefully. Medications such as blood-thinners may need to be stopped for a short time after having your colonoscopy, especially if tissue was removed during the procedure. Full recovery by the next day is normal and expected and you may return to your regular activities.

Important Information: The information included on this sheet is intended only to provide general guidance and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any instance. It is extremely important that you consult a physician about your specific condition.

