

WHAT IS A COLONOSCOPY?

A colonoscopy is a procedure that lets your doctor look inside your colon and rectum. Your colon and rectum are parts of your digestive system. Your colon is also called the large intestine, bowel or gut. Your colon absorbs water and minerals from food and is a storage place for waste. Waste moves from your colon to your rectum. Your body gets rid of this waste as stool.

A small, flexible tube called a colonoscope is used to look inside your colon and rectum. The tube is put into your rectum and slowly advanced through your colon. The tube is about the size of a finger. The tube bends, blows air into your colon, and has a light on the end, which lets your doctor see inside better. You may feel some mild cramping when air is blown into your colon.

WHY IS A COLONOSCOPY DONE?

A colonoscopy is the best test available to find and treat problems in your colon. Your doctor may suggest a colonoscopy for:

- Blood in the stool
- Changes in bowel habits
- Unexplained stomach problems
- Diarrhea
- A personal history of polyps or colon cancer
- A family history of polyps, cancer and

inflammatory bowel disease such as colitis or Crohn's disease

- Screening (usually beginning at age 50)

If anything looks suspicious, tissue samples (biopsy) will be taken. Tissue samples are also taken when there are polyps, a growth, inflammation or other areas that need to be checked more closely. The tissue samples are sent to the lab and examined.

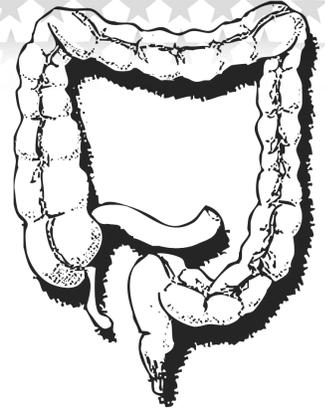
Any polyps or small tumors are usually removed. Polyps are abnormal growths in your colon. Usually, polyps are noncancerous (no cancer), but cancer can start in polyps.

HOW DO I GET READY FOR MY COLONOSCOPY?

Your bowel must be completely clean before you can have the procedure. You will be instructed when to begin a clear liquid diet.

A clear liquid diet may include:

- Apple, white grape or white cranberry juice
- Sprite, 7-Up, Mountain Dew, Mellow Yellow, Fresca, clear Gatorade, ginger ale, lemonade, tea, coffee or water
- Yellow or orange Popsicles
- Clear bouillon or broth (beef or chicken)
- Yellow or orange Jello



You **cannot** eat or drink any of the following on the clear liquid diet:

- Solid foods
- Cream or creamer; dairy products
- Crackers
- Bread
- Anything red, blue or purple such as Jello or Popsicles
- Diet supplement drinks, such as Slimfast, Weight Watchers, etc.
- Any meat, including seafood

You will be given laxatives and told how to use them. Some providers include enemas as part of the prep. You must follow your instructions carefully. Your colon must be completely free of solid waste. If your colon is not clean, the exam and prep may have to be repeated.

You can drink clear liquids until midnight the night before your exam. Do not drink or eat anything after midnight.

You may have medicines you must take.

If your provider told you to take your medicines, do so with only a small sip of water.

If your colon is not clean or you eat or drink, your colonoscopy will be canceled and rescheduled. This means repeating the bowel prep again.

If you smoke, stop smoking at midnight.

ARE THERE RISKS?

A colonoscopy is generally safe and complications are rare. However, there is some risk for complication with all medical procedures. The most common problems are cramping and bloating (gas) about one hour after the procedure. There is a possibility your colon may be punctured. If this happens, surgery may be required to repair the puncture.

There is also a risk of bleeding. Minor bleeding may occur at a biopsy site or where polyps are removed. It may stop on its own or be stopped through the colonoscopy. However, surgery may be required to stop the bleeding.

You could have a reaction to the medicines. Make sure you tell your provider about all of the medicines you are currently taking. Also, tell your provider about any allergies and major health problems you may have.

This procedure is usually safe and severe complications are rare. Talk with your health care provider about any concerns you have.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I GET TO THE HOSPITAL?

You will be told when to be at the hospital. Make sure you arrive on time. Bring someone who can drive you home after your procedure. You cannot drive yourself home because you will be given medicine that makes you sleepy. It is not safe for you to drive after your procedure. Your procedure will be canceled if you don't bring someone with you to drive you home.



In the hospital, your vital signs will be taken. Your vital signs include:

- Temperature
- Respiration
- Blood pressure
- Heart rate

Your oxygen level will also be measured. A device called a pulse oximeter will be placed on your finger, toe or ear lobe. This does not hurt. You will be hooked up to an electrocardiograph (EKG) machine. This machine shows each heartbeat. You will also get an IV (a needle, with tubing attached to a bag of fluid) put in your hand or arm.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE COLONOSCOPY?

You will be given medicine to relax you and make you feel sleepy. The exam takes between 30 and 60 minutes. You will usually lie on your left side. The colonoscope will be put into your rectum and slowly advanced. Your doctor examines your colon as the tube is slowly moved through your colon. The colon is also examined as the tube is slowly pulled out.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE COLONOSCOPY?

After your exam, you will be moved to the recovery room. You will stay in the recovery room for about 60 minutes. Your nurse will tell you when it's okay for you to put your street clothes back on. Your nurse will also

give you and your driver discharge instructions. You will be discharged with your driver. **Your driver has to drive you home.** You cannot drive because it is unsafe for you as well as others.

You may have some bloating (gas) and stomach cramping afterwards. This is temporary and will go away as you pass gas. You should take it easy for the rest of the day. Your judgment and reflexes may be off. Do not drive, operate machinery or make critical decisions. You can resume eating regular foods.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS?

Call your health care provider if you have:

- Severe stomach pains
- Bleeding from your rectum and in your stool
- A temperature more than 100°
- Vomiting

Call the Endoscopy Nurse at (850) 912-2347 or toll free (866) 927-1420, extension 32347, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

You may leave a voice message after hours.

If you feel you are having problems that cannot wait, go to the emergency room (ER) located at Naval Hospital Pensacola (NHP), the Biloxi VAMC or the closest ER.

GULF COAST VETERANS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Joint Ambulatory Care Center

790 Veterans Way | Pensacola, FL 32507

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