



Colonoscopy

What is a Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a test where a surgeon looks into your colon or large intestine. The colon is the part of the gut which comes after the small intestine. The last part of the colon leads into the rectum where feces are stored before being passed out through the anus.

A colonoscope is a thin, flexible telescope. It is passed through the anus and into the colon. It can be guided all the way around the colon as far as the cecum (where the small and large intestine meet). The colonoscope contains fiber optic channels which allow light to shine down so the surgeon can see inside your colon. It also has a "side channel" through which devices can pass. For example, the surgeon may take a small sample (biopsy) from the inside lining of the colon or may remove a polyp by using a thin "grabbing" instrument.

Who should have a colonoscopy?

A screening colonoscopy should be part of every individual's preventative health care regimen, starting at age 50 and, with no symptoms or issues, obtained every 5-10 years thereafter.

A colonoscopy may also be advised if you have symptoms such as bleeding from the rectum, pains in the lower abdomen, persistent diarrhea, or other symptoms thought to be coming from the colon. Some of the conditions which can be confirmed include:

- Ulcerative colitis (inflammation of the colon)
- Crohn's disease (inflammation of the colon)
- Diverticula (pouches which form in the lining of the colon)
- Polyps (precancerous growths in the lining of the colon)
- Cancer of the colon

What preparation do I need to do?

You will get instructions from your surgeon before your test, but preparations include:

- The colon needs to be empty so that the surgeon can get a clear view. You will be instructed on how to take a special diet the day before the test. Also, you will be prescribed some form of laxative.
- After the procedure, you will need somebody to accompany you home as you may still be drowsy from the sedative.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a routine test usually done as an outpatient procedure. You will be given a sedative to help you relax and make you drowsy.

During the procedure you lie on your side on a surgical table. The general surgeon will gently guide the end of the colonoscope into your anus and into your colon. The surgeon can look down the colonoscope and inspect the lining of the colon. Also, through a camera attachment on the colonoscope, pictures are transmitted onto a television monitor for the surgeon to view. Air is passed down the channel in the colonoscope in order to inflate the colon to make the inside lining easier to see. The air may make you feel bloated, cause some mild gas pains, and may cause you to pass gas during the procedure and after. The surgeon may take biopsies of the inside lining of the colon or remove polyps to send to the lab for analysis. At the end of the procedure, the colonoscope is gently drawn out.

A colonoscopy usually takes about 20-30 minutes. However, you should allow at least two hours for the whole appointment for the sedative to work, the colonoscopy itself and recovery from the sedative. A colonoscopy does not hurt, but it can be a bit uncomfortable.