

Colonoscopy

What to expect

A colonoscopy is a procedure that lets your clinician check the lining of your colon for any abnormalities (anything not usual or typical), including inflamed (swollen) tissue or polyps (growth of extra tissue). Some polyps can become cancerous. Evidence shows that colon cancer screening save lives—and colonoscopy is the standard for screening.

To make sure your colonoscopy provides the most accurate information, your colon must be clean and free of stool. Your clinician will give you specific directions to prepare your colon for the procedure. **Following these directions exactly is important.** If you don't prepare properly, your colonoscopy may be canceled. Or you may have to prepare again for another colonoscopy.

What do I do before my procedure?

- **Arrange to have a trusted adult drive you home after your procedure or ride with you by bus, taxi or ridesharing service.** Don't ride a motorcycle.

» We strongly encourage your trusted adult to stay during your appointment (usually takes about 2 hours).

If you don't arrange to have a trusted adult drive you, your procedure will be canceled. Medications you receive during your procedure affect your ability to think clearly for many hours. This makes driving or traveling alone dangerous.

- » If your trusted adult can't stay, we ask that they check in at the front desk with you. Your trusted adult will need to provide their phone number before leaving and **must** return when called.
- Follow the directions on the handout for your specific colonoscopy bowel preparation, including what to do about medications before the procedure.
 - » Be sure to drink all of the bowel preparation solution exactly as stated in the handout directions, **not** the directions on the solution packaging.

- » If your stool isn't clear or yellow liquid before leaving for your procedure appointment, call us (see "Phone numbers").
- Bring a list of your current medications to your procedure. Include over-the-counter medications, and the strength and dose of each.
- Don't wear fragrant perfumes or lotions to your procedure.

Tips for colon cleansing

To make your preparation as easy as possible, follow these tips:

Drinking the solution

- Use a timer to tell you when to drink the solution. Set the timer for every 10 minutes.
- Drink the entire glass of solution quickly. This allows the solution to fully clean out your colon.
- **Remain near a toilet.**
 - » Dress comfortably.
 - » You will have diarrhea.
 - » You may have chills.
- Expect to be uncomfortable until the stool has cleared from your colon (2 to 4 hours).
- Even when sitting on the toilet, continue to drink the solution every 10 minutes.

Easing discomfort

- If you have nausea or vomiting:
 - » Rinse your mouth with water.
 - » Take a 15- to 30-minute break from drinking the solution. If your clinician has prescribed the anti-nausea medication ondansetron hydrochloride (Zofran), take it as needed for nausea according to the label.
 - » After this break, start drinking the solution again.
 - » Try sucking on hard candies (not red or purple—these colors can interfere with your procedure).
- To ease skin irritation from the diarrhea:
 - » Use alcohol-free baby wipes, Tucks medicated cooling pads or over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream for hemorrhoid treatment.
 - » Apply petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline, to help protect your skin.

What happens during my procedure?

- When you check in, you'll be asked for your health insurance card, photo ID and completed health history form (if a form was given to you).
- You'll be taken to a private preparation room where you'll put on a gown.
- Your nurse will review your medications, allergies and medical history.
- An IV will be placed in your arm to give you medications during your procedure. The medication relaxes you and minimizes any discomfort during your procedure.
 - » Many people may not remember all or some of the procedure. You may fall asleep.
 - » You may choose to not be sedated. Talk to your clinician if you have any concerns about receiving medication for the procedure.
- Your clinician who'll do your colonoscopy may meet with you to answer any questions you have before the procedure.
- You'll then be taken to the procedure room, where you'll lie on your left side with knees bent during the procedure.

- Your clinician will insert a flexible tube through your rectum into your colon. The tube, which is connected to a video monitor, has a video camera on the tip. Your clinician will then insert gas (carbon dioxide) or air into your colon.
 - » The gas or air inflates your colon and provides your clinician with a better view.
 - » You may feel pressure, bloating or cramping.
 - » Your clinician will examine the entire length of your colon, and may collect tissue biopsies (samples) and remove any polyps to send to the laboratory for testing.
 - » If your clinician takes a tissue sample, you will not feel it.
 - » Your nurse will monitor your blood pressure and oxygen.
- When finished examining your colon, your clinician will remove the flexible tube. The gas or air is then slowly taken out of your colon.
- The procedure usually takes about 20 to 45 minutes. The amount of time depends on how well your bowel preparation worked, the length of your colon and the number of polyps found and removed.

What happens after my procedure?

- You'll be taken to a recovery area and monitored until you leave for home. You'll spend about 30 minutes in recovery.
- Your nurse will let you know when it's OK to drink something.
- You may feel drowsy and sleep for a short time.
- You may pass gas. This'll help relieve pressure you may have from any bloating.
- Before you leave for home, you'll receive written care instructions. These will include the following restrictions:
 - » Don't go to work or school, use any machinery or drive the day of your procedure.
 - » Return to eating and drinking as usual, unless your clinician gives you other directions.

What are the risks and side effects of a colonoscopy?

Complications rarely happen, but may include the following:

- Perforation (a tear) in the colon lining—This may require surgery.
- Bleeding at the biopsy site or where a polyp was removed—This is usually minor and rarely severe enough to require hospitalization and treatment.
- A missed diagnosis—for example, a polyp that wasn't seen during the procedure.
- Receiving too much sedation or having an allergic reaction to the sedative.
- Postcautery syndrome (pain and fever from cautery burn of the colon wall)—This may require hospitalization and treatment.

How do I get my results?

Your clinician may discuss the results of your colonoscopy with you before you leave for home.

If you had a biopsy, your clinician will let you know the results by letter in 14 days (or sooner if you need care right away) or through your HealthPartners online account, if you have an active account.

What about payment?

Contact your health insurance company about your coverage and benefits for a colonoscopy. Coverage and benefits depend on your insurance plan and the reason for the colonoscopy (routine screening or diagnostic to look for a cause related to symptoms).

Phone numbers

To cancel or reschedule your procedure, or for questions about your bowel preparation or procedure, call the number on the handout *Gastroenterology and Endoscopy Locations*.

