

INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT

# COLONOSCOPY

## Preparing for a Colonoscopy

### **Informed consent:**

Medical procedures should only be done when you have given informed consent. You must have enough information to understand the procedure and the benefits and risks that go along with it. Please review this information carefully and ask any questions to make sure that you understand the colonoscopy procedure.

### **What is a colonoscopy?**

A colonoscopy is a procedure which allows the inside of the colon (also called large intestine or large bowel) to be examined using a long thin flexible tube with a tiny video camera at the tip.

### **What are some of the common reasons for having colonoscopy?**

Colonoscopies help doctors diagnose possible causes of rectal bleeding, diarrhea and sometimes, chronic abdominal pain. In Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, colonoscopy is also used to assess colon inflammation.

Colonoscopies are used to screen for colon polyps and early signs of colon cancer. Most polyps are harmless, but some can turn into cancer if they're not removed. On average, one in fifteen (7%) Canadians will get colon cancer. Most often this happens at an older age. Screening for colon cancer decreases the risk of developing and dying from colon cancer.

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## **What are the risks of colonoscopy?**

Complications are rare. They are less common among younger persons and those with no other medical problems. The risks are also less if you do not require removal of a polyp or other special procedures during colonoscopy.

Some people have a bloated feeling after the colonoscopy because of the air inserted to view the colon. These people find it helpful to walk around a bit once they are feeling steady.

Minor complications: Abdominal discomfort, bloating, medication reactions or temporary bleeding occur in about 1 in 100 people having a colonoscopy (1%).

Major complications, such as perforation or a hole being made in the intestine and large amounts of bleeding, are rare and occur in less than 1 in 1000 persons (0.1%). Surgery and/or hospitalization may be required to manage this in about 1 in 3000 (0.03%). Death occurs in 1 of 10,000 people having a colonoscopy.

## **How do I prepare for a colonoscopy?**

Some people are anxious (nervous) about the procedure. Please let your nurse or doctor know about any of your concerns. Most (more than 90%) people having a colonoscopy report a comfortable experience.

Your doctor or other staff on behalf of your doctor will give you detailed instructions about preparation. It is important that you follow the instructions carefully, starting a week before the test, so that your colon is clean and your doctor can have a clear view of your colon during the test.

You may also see instructions and video materials about colonoscopy at the following location: [www.colonoscopy.informedchoices.ca](http://www.colonoscopy.informedchoices.ca).

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## **What will happen at the hospital/endoscopy facility when I go for colonoscopy?**

1. Bring a list of your medications to the facility.  
Do not bring valuables, wear jewelry, or wear nail polish.
2. Bring your medical card and register when you arrive.
3. You will change into a hospital gown.
4. A nurse will meet with you to briefly review your medical history and your medications. You will have your blood pressure and heart rate checked.
5. Sedation: An intravenous (IV) line will be placed in your arm. This IV line will be used to provide medicines (usually midazolam and fentanyl) to make you sleepy when your procedure is started.

Although, most people in North America get these medicines for colonoscopy, some people have colonoscopy without any sleeping medicines. People who do not use these medicines will remember the procedure and may experience some discomfort and possibly some pain. They will also be able to view the video display (if they wish) to see the appearance of the colon. They can return to normal activities immediately after the colonoscopy.

Persons who have sedation are less likely to have pain or discomfort. They should not drive for up to 24 hours afterward and should have someone who can take them home and stay with them after the colonoscopy.

If you have preferences or questions about sedation and the medicines used, ask the doctor doing the test or their nurse about this before the day of the colonoscopy. Most doctors have medicines that they prefer to use for a colonoscopy.

6. You will be taken on a stretcher to the colonoscopy room. You will be met there by your doctor and other staff.

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## What will happen during colonoscopy?

1. You will be positioned on your left side. In many hospitals/ endoscopy facilities, you will be given oxygen, and your blood pressure, heart rate and breathing will be monitored throughout the procedure.
2. You will be given the medicines to make you drowsy. The purpose of these medications is to keep you comfortable throughout the test. Some people sleep through the test. Others are more awake.
3. The doctor will start the examination by inserting an examining finger into the rectum. Then the colonoscopy tube, which is the thickness of the examining finger, will be inserted into your rectum and inside of your colon (large bowel/large intestine) examined.
4. The procedure is done over approximately 20 to 45 minutes. Your doctor spends this time carefully moving the tube through your colon and viewing the lining of the colon. The colonoscope may be used to insert air or water to improve the viewing. The instrument may be used to take tissue samples or to remove polyps, but you will not feel anything when this is done.

## What happens after colonoscopy?

1. You will spend another 30 minutes to an hour recovering from the sedation given for the test. You may spend a total (before and after the test) of 3-5 hours at the facility
2. Your doctor will provide you with a note regarding the test outcome. The doctor or a nurse will also discuss the results with you and the person accompanying you. If you were given sedation during the colonoscopy, you may not remember the discussion. It is important that you bring someone with you who can listen to the results and pass them on to you later.
3. Any polyps or tissue samples (biopsies) that are removed will be sent for review by a pathologist. The results are generally available within a month. If there are any concerning or important findings, you will be called directly by your doctor's office, or you may be asked to return to clinic to discuss the results. A letter will also be sent to your referring doctor or nurse to inform them of the results and outline further treatment plans if necessary.

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## **How is recovery after the colonoscopy?**

**If you have sedation with your procedure:** After the procedure, you spend 30 to 60 minutes in the recovery room until you are more awake and alert. After recovery, you will be discharged from hospital. You should not drive for 24 hours and should have someone with you who will take you home and stay with you until you have fully recovered. Your doctor may require that you arrange for someone to stay overnight with you.

**If you have no sedation with your procedure:** You can go home or back to work immediately after the colonoscopy. You do not need anyone to stay with you and are able to drive yourself.

## **What can I eat after colonoscopy?**

Although in general there are no restrictions, you should start with fluids (juice, soup) and light food and then gradually increase to a more regular diet. Light foods are easy to chew and digest. Immediately after a colonoscopy, you may not be able to tolerate heavy foods such as steak and greasy foods.

**If you have any questions regarding the procedure, your medications, or preparation instructions, please call your endoscopy doctor's office.**

**For additional information:** [www.colonoscopy.informedchoices.ca](http://www.colonoscopy.informedchoices.ca)