

Colonoscopy



ASCRS
American Society of
Colon and Rectal Surgeons

Colonoscopy

Colonoscopy is a procedure used to diagnose abnormalities of the colon (large intestine). It is considered the most optimal screening test for colorectal cancer and polyps of the colon and rectum (abnormal growths). Colonoscopy allows doctors to identify and remove certain types of colon polyps before they develop into cancer. It is highly effective, therapeutic and often lifesaving.

Colonoscopy Recommendations

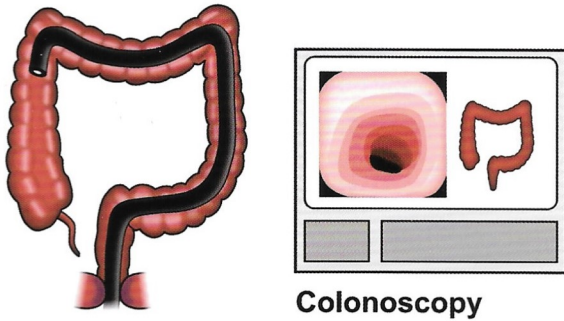
Screening is the process of examining otherwise healthy patients for undiagnosed colon polyps or cancer. The goal of a screening program is to detect disease at its earliest stages, which allows for the most effective treatment.

As part of a colorectal cancer screening program, colonoscopy is routinely recommended for adults starting at age 50. For those with a family history of colon or rectal cancer, a colonoscopy may be recommended earlier and more frequently.



A colonoscopy may be recommended to evaluate symptoms such as:

- Rectal bleeding.
- A change in bowel habits.
- Unexplained abdominal pain.
- Acute or chronic anemia.
- Unexplained weight loss.



A colonoscopy may also be recommended for:

- Follow-up exams when there is a personal history of colon or rectal polyps or colorectal cancer.
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis).
- Specific familial conditions such as hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (Lynch syndrome).

Colonoscopy Preparation

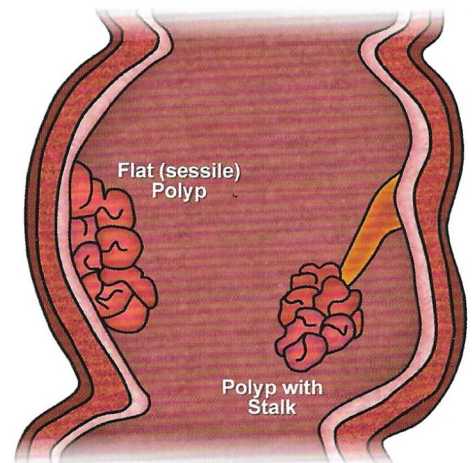
To prepare for the test, your physician will likely discuss any dietary changes and medication restrictions. Typically, these

need to be followed a few days prior to the colonoscopy. The day before the procedure, most patients need to undergo a bowel prep. This allows for complete visualization of the bowel surface during the test. Your physician will prescribe a preparation that cleanses the bowels of stool and other residue. This may be in the form of a liquid laxative, pills and/or an enema. It is important to complete the cleansing process as requested by your physician and not eat after doing so.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to discuss them with your physician before the day of the procedure.

The Colonoscopy Procedure

A colonoscopy is performed by experienced, specially trained physicians. This test is typically done by gastroenterologists, colon and rectal surgeons or general surgeons. It can be done in a hospital outpatient department, a clinic or a physician's office.



Intravenous sedation is usually given throughout the procedure so patients remain comfortable. During the test, your physician will examine your colon using a long, thin flexible tube with a camera and a light on the end (colonoscope). This is inserted into the rectum and advanced to the first portion of the colon, where it connects to the end of the small intestine (ileum). For most patients, a colonoscopy takes less than an hour and any discomfort is minor.

Post-Colonoscopy Care

Some patients may feel mild discomfort afterwards. Abdominal cramping and “gas pains” are quickly resolved by passing air/gas while in recovery. Many patients do not recall details of the test due to the type of sedation used.

Before your colonoscopy, ask someone to drive you to and from the surgical center. Medications used for sedation affect judgment and coordination for varying time periods. It is a good idea to ask this person to be present when your physician or nurse discusses care instructions with you prior to discharge.

Following a colonoscopy, most patients can go back to eating their regular diets. Your physician will decide when you can resume taking routine medications. The majority of patients are able to return to normal activities the morning after the colonoscopy.



Colonoscopy Benefits and Risks

Colonoscopy is the test of choice for colon cancer screening and detection. A key benefit is the ability to see not only abnormal findings like polyps, but also to remove them at the same time. If polyps are found, they are usually able to be removed and sent for analysis. Colonoscopy is a very safe procedure with few complications. Less than 1% of patients experience problems. These include:

- Bleeding.
- Perforation (a tear in the intestine).
- Rare side effects from sedation medications.