

# Colonoscopy

## Alternative Testing

Alternative tests to colonoscopy include a barium enema or other types of x-ray exams that outline the colon and allow a diagnosis to be made. In addition, study of the stools and blood can provide indirect information about a colon condition. These exams, however, do not allow direct viewing of the colon or removal of polyps or biopsies to be done.

## Side Effects and Risks

Bloating and distension typically occur for about an hour after the exam until air is expelled. Serious risks with colonoscopy, however, are uncommon. One such risk is excessive bleeding, especially with the removal of a polyp. In rare instances, a perforation or tear in the lining of the colon can occur. These complications may require hospitalization and, rarely, surgery. Quite uncommonly a diagnostic error or oversight may occur.

Due to the use of sedatives, patient reflexes may be slowed, and the patient should not drive, operate machinery or make important decisions immediately following the exam. For this reason, a driver should be made available.

Call your doctor if you have abdominal pain, high fever or bleeding

## Benefits

A colonoscopy is performed to identify and/or correct a problem in the colon. The test enables a diagnosis to be made and specific treatments can be given. If a polyp is found during the exam, it can be removed at that time, eliminating the need for a major operation later. If a bleeding site is identified, treatment can be administered to stop the bleeding. Other treatments can be given through the endoscope when necessary. If necessary, further studies or treatments may be recommended.

## In Summary

Colonoscopy is an outpatient exam that is performed with the patient comfortably sedated. The procedure provides significant information upon which specific treatment can be given. In certain cases, therapy can be administered directly through the endoscope. Serious complications rarely occur from colonoscopy. The physician or his staff can answer any questions the patient has.



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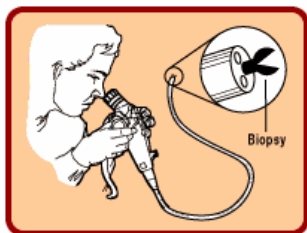
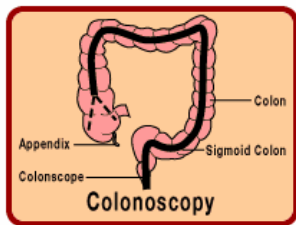
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## Colonoscopy

Colonoscopy is the visual examination of the large intestine (colon) using a lighted, flexible fiber optic or video endoscope. The colon begins in the right-lower abdomen and looks like a big question mark as it moves up and around the abdomen, ending in the rectum. It is 5 to 6 feet long. The colon has a number of functions including withdrawing water from the liquid stool that enters it so that a formed stool is produced.

## Equipment

The flexible colonoscope is a remarkable piece of equipment that can be directed and moved around the many bends in the colon. Colonoscopes are newer video endoscopies that contain a tiny, optically sensitive computer chip at the end. Electronic signals are then transmitted up the scope to a computer which displays the image on a large video screen. Photographs are often taken to document findings during colonoscopy. An open channel in both scopes allows the other instruments to be passed through in order to perform biopsies, remove polyps or inject solutions.



## Reasons for the Exam

There are many types of problems that can occur in the colon. The medical history, physical exam, laboratory tests and x-rays can provide useful information. Directly viewing the inside of the colon by colonoscopy is usually the best exam. Colonoscopy is used for:

- Colon Cancer—a serious but highly curable malignancy
- Polyps—fleshy tumors which usually are the forerunners of colon cancer
- Colitis (Ulcerative or Crohn's) - chronic, recurrent inflammation of the colon
- Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis—pockets along the intestinal wall that develop over time and can become infected or perforate.
- Bleeding Lesions—hidden or massive bleeding that may occur from different points in the colon
- Abdominal symptoms, such as pain, discomfort or change in bowel habits
- Abnormal barium x-ray exam
- Chronic diarrhea or constipation

## Preparation

To obtain the full benefits of the exam, the colon must be cleaned of stool. The patient receives instructions on how to do this. It involves drinking a solution which flushes the colon clean or using laxatives. Usually the patient drinks only liquids and eats no solid food for the day before the exam. The physician advises the patient regarding the use of regular medications during that time, and should be informed of any medication allergies.

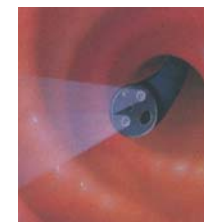
## The Procedure

Colonoscopy is usually performed on an outpatient basis. The patient, lying on their left side, is sedated to the point of sleeping through the examination. The lubricated endoscope is inserted slowly and gently through the anus and moved gently around the bends of the colon. Air is used to expand the colon to provide the physician a clear view. If a polyp is encountered, a thin wire snare is used to lasso it. Electrocautery (electrical heat) is applied to painlessly remove it and to reduce the risk of bleeding. Other tests can be performed during colonoscopy, including biopsy to obtain a small tissue specimen for microscopic analysis.

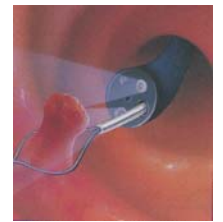
The procedure takes 15 to 30 minutes and is seldom remembered by the sedated patient. A recovery area is available to monitor vital signs until the patient is fully aware. It is normal to experience mild cramping or abdominal pressure. This usually subsides an hour or so. Walking helps to relieve the bloated feeling.

## Results

After the exam, the physician explains the findings to the patient and family and writes them on their discharge instruction sheet. If the effects of the sedatives are prolonged or findings are significant, the physician may suggest an appointment at a later date. If a biopsy has been performed or a polyp removed, the results of these are not available for three to seven days.



Normal Colon



Polyp Removal



Growths Can be Biopsied