

AGA Patient Education Section

Colonoscopy

A colonoscopy is a safe and effective test to look inside your colon. A colonoscopy is the main way doctors check for colon diseases and remove colon polyps. A polyp is a flat, mushroom-like growth that slowly grows on the inside wall of the colon or rectum. Some polyps become cancerous, and others do not. A colonoscopy also may be performed to look at other health issues in the gastrointestinal tract, such as:

- Belly or rectal pain that will not go away.
- Blood in your stool.
- Change in bowel habits.
- Inflamed colon seen on a computed tomography scan.

A gastroenterologist uses a colonoscope, which is a long, thin, flexible tube with a tiny camera attached at the end to look inside.



Preparing for Your Colonoscopy

Your doctor will give you specific instructions for preparing for your colonoscopy—be sure to follow them completely.

You will need to clean out your colon before the test. There are many ways to cleanse the bowel. Often, you will need to eat only clear liquids the day before the test and drink a liquid that will help you move your bowels until your stool comes out clear.

Your doctor will answer any of your questions beforehand and review what to expect after the test. You will be given an intravenous line to give you medicine that will help you relax and make you feel sleepy during the examination.

During Your Colonoscopy

During the procedure, you will not feel much. The doctor will place the colonoscope into your anus, passing through the rectum. Air will be passed through the colonoscope to expand the bowels so that the doctor can see better, which may cause you to feel some cramping. In some cases, the doctor may need to do a biopsy (taking a small piece of tissue to look at under the microscope—you will not feel this). If a polyp is found, your doctor will remove it.

After Your Colonoscopy

Your doctor will give you more detail about what to expect after the test, but you will be in a recovery room

until the medicine wears off. The doctor or a nurse will review the results with you, and tell you when the biopsy results will be available if one was taken. You should arrange to have a family member or friend take you home and plan to take it easy for the rest of the day, but you can resume normal activities the following day after the procedure.

Safety

A colonoscopy is a safe and effective test, but complications sometimes can arise, even with a skilled doctor. Problems during a colonoscopy are rare, but some that might occur are as follows:

- Tearing or puncturing of the colon walls, which might need to be fixed in an emergency surgery.
- Heavy bleeding because of a biopsy or the removal of a polyp.

Sometimes a blood transfusion is needed.

Sometimes the colonoscope needs to be put back in to control the bleeding.

- Some colon lesions (abnormalities) could be missed.

If you have any specific concerns about the test, be sure to talk with your doctor before the procedure.

For more details on preparing for your colonoscopy, talk to your gastroenterologist and visit www.gastro.org/patient-care/procedures/colonoscopy.