

Colonoscopy

A colonoscopy is an exam used to detect disease of the lower digestive tract for early signs of colon and rectal cancer. This includes polyps, which can, over time, develop into cancer. It also is helpful in finding the cause of diarrhea, bleeding or changes in bowel habits.

*If you have
any questions
please call your
doctor's office
or the GI Lab,
312-926-7614.*

The test, done in the GI Lab, takes about 30 minutes. But your total time in the lab is about 2½ to 3 hours. During the exam, a small flexible tube is inserted into the rectum and to the colon. At the end of the tube is a tiny video camera with a light. This test may be more helpful than X-rays alone since the doctor may:

- Actually view the area.
- Remove polyps.
- Take a small tissue sample (biopsy).

The colon must be fully emptied so the doctor can view the area. Depending on the exam time and your needs, the bowel prep may vary. Your doctor will give you specific written instructions. Follow these bowel prep guidelines carefully. Be sure to obtain this instruction sheet from your doctor. Your doctor will give a *Patient Questionnaire* form and *Patient Medication List* to you to complete and bring with you on the day of the exam.

Before the Test

14 Days Before the Test

Talk with your doctor about your routine medicines. It is important to tell the doctor if you:

- Are on any “blood-thinning” medicines such as anti-coagulants, aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Are taking an iron supplement
- Are a diabetic or have problems with low blood sugar
- Take antibiotics prior to certain medical procedures
- Have an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)

Patients First

Blood thinning medications and iron supplements are often stopped 7 days before the colonoscopy. Diabetics need to follow their doctor's guidelines for how to adjust oral medications and insulin.

7 Days Before the Test

Follow your doctor's guidelines on how to take:

- Iron supplements
- Anticoagulants or prescribed blood thinners
- Any medications containing aspirin
- NSAIDs including ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)

If you are unsure about the medicines included in these groups, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may be taken for minor pain.

Purchase the bowel prep (NuLytely®, Fleet Phospho Soda®, Visicol®) ordered by your doctor. These are found at most drug stores.

48 Hours (2 Business Days) Before the Test

Please call 312-926-2950 to pre-register for your colonoscopy. Have your medical insurance cards and Social Security number ready. Be sure to complete the *Patient Questionnaire* form provided by your doctor. If you need to cancel or change your appointment, contact your doctor's office.

Day Before the Test

Refer to your doctor's instruction sheet for your specific prep including:

- Liquid diet guidelines
- Bowel prep (NuLytely®, Fleet Phospho Soda®, Visicol®)

If you have any questions, please call your doctor's office or you may contact the Gastrointestinal (GI) Lab patient care coordinator at 312-926-7614.

Day of the Test

Unless told otherwise, take all routine medicines (except blood thinners, aspirin, NSAIDs) on the morning of your exam with sips of water. Follow your doctor's diet guidelines. Remember, sips of water are allowed until 3 hours before the exam.

It is helpful to wear loose, comfortable clothes on the day of the exam. Be sure to bring the completed *Patient Questionnaire* form and *Patient Medication List* and plan to have a responsible adult to take you home after the exam.

Please arrive at the GI Lab 30 minutes before your test. It is located at the Galter Pavilion, 201 E. Huron St. Take the elevators to the 4th floor and go to the front desk check-in area.

Parking is available for patients and visitors in the garage at 222 E. Huron, across from the Feinberg and Galter Pavilions. For discounted rates, please bring your parking ticket with you. Tickets can be validated at the Customer Services Desks on the 1st and 2nd floor of the Feinberg and Galter Pavilions; 1st floor of Prentice (including the Prentice 24 hour desk near the Superior St. entrance).

After changing into a hospital gown, an IV (into the vein) line will be inserted into your hand or arm. The IV is used for giving medicine during the exam. The doctor will explain the exam and answer any questions you may have. You will be asked to sign a written consent.

During the Exam

Before the test begins, the nurse helps you lie on an exam table on your left side. Medicine to relax you is injected into the IV. Once the medicine starts working, the doctor slowly inserts the colonoscope in your rectum to the large intestine. Pictures of the lining of the colon can be seen on a TV monitor.

If polyps or abnormal tissue are noted, a biopsy may be done. A thin wire or looped device is inserted into the colonoscope to remove a tissue sample or the entire polyp. (This is not painful.) If bleeding is found in the colon, a small laser probe or medicine can be used to stop the bleeding.

During the exam, you may feel bloating. This is due to the air used to expand the folds of the colon for easier viewing. You may also have some cramps as the colonoscope moves through the curves of the large intestine. Medicine is given through the IV to relieve this discomfort and to relax you. Your blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and oxygen level will be checked often.

After the Exam

The nurse will check on you often for at least 1 hour after the exam while the medicine wears off. The nurse will ask you to lie on your left side to allow you to pass gas. This also helps relieve any cramping and bloating. Due to the limited space, there is no visiting in the recovery area. Please let us know about any special visiting needs.

The medicine given during the test affects your judgment and reflexes. You may feel groggy. Do not drive or operate machinery until the next day. You must have a responsible adult accompany you home.

Unless you are otherwise instructed, you may resume your diet and routine medicine after you leave the GI Lab. You also will be given written guidelines before you leave.

Test Results

The doctor or nurse will discuss the exam results with you or your family on the day of the test. A follow-up doctor's visit to go over your exam and biopsy results may be needed. Biopsy results are usually ready 5 to 7 days after your test.

When to Call the Doctor

After the exam, you may notice a small amount of blood in your bowel movements. This is normal. However, contact your doctor if you have:

- Severe abdominal pain.
- A fever above 100.5° F.
- Chills.
- Significant rectal bleeding.

If you have any questions about this test, please contact your doctor or the GI Lab patient care coordinator at 312-926-7614.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar a el departamento de representantes para pacientes al 312-926-3112.

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