Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)

Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) is a test used to study the ducts (drainage paths) of the liver, pancreas and gallbladder. It uses a thin flexible tube (endoscope) with a tiny video camera and light. The tube is inserted into the mouth and advanced to the small bowel. The doctor is able to see the small openings to the common bile duct and pancreatic duct. The exam, done in the GI Lab, takes about 1½ hours. But your total time in the lab is about 3 to 4 hours.

An ERCP is helpful in detecting diseases of the pancreas, bile ducts, liver and gallbladder. It also can allow the doctor to:
- Place a stent (tube) to open a blockage.
- Repair narrowed ducts.
- Obtain tissue biopsies.
- Remove stones or sludge in the ducts.
- Decide whether surgery is needed.

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 medications that “thin the blood,” such as anti-coagulants, aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- Have any medical condition that affects bleeding time (how long it takes your blood to clot).
- Have any known drug allergies, including allergies to iodine or contrast dye.
- Are a diabetic or have problems with low blood sugar.
- Are or may be pregnant.
- Take antibiotics prior to certain medical procedures.
- Have an ICD (implantable cardioverter defibrillator).

“Blood-thinning” medicines often are stopped 7 days before the ERCP. Diabetics need to follow their doctors’ guidelines for how to adjust oral medicines and insulin.
7 Days Before the Test
Follow your doctor’s guidelines on how to take:
- Anticoagulants or prescribed “blood thinners.”
- Any medicines that contain 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.

Evening Before
The stomach must be completely empty for the ERCP. If your exam is before 12 noon, do not eat or drink anything after midnight.

Note: If the exam is after 12 noon, then do not eat or drink 8 hours prior to your ERCP. You may drink small sips of water with needed medicines up to 3 hours before your test. Do not chew gum or eat candy.

Day of the Test
Unless told otherwise, take all routine medicines (except blood thinners, aspirin or NSAIDs) on the morning of your exam with sips of water. Follow your doctor’s diet guidelines.

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. A nurse will review the form with you upon arriving at the Gastrointestinal (GI) Lab. A responsible adult must be available to take you home.

Please arrive at the GI Lab 1 hour before your test. It is located at Galter Pavilion, 675 North Saint Clair Street. Take the elevators to the 4th floor and go to the front desk check-in area of the Lab.

Parking is available for patients and visitors in the garage at 222 East Huron Street, 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 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 explains the exam, and any problems that may occur, and answers your questions. You are asked to sign a written consent.

During the ERCP
Two nurses assist the doctor during the exam. You are placed on your stomach with your left arm at your side, your right arm up near your head and left cheek on the pillow (swimming position). A numbing medicine is sprayed into your throat. You are then given medicine to help you sleep and keep you comfortable. Most patients do not remember the exam.
Once you are sedated, the doctor begins. The scope is passed down through your mouth, esophagus and stomach, and into the first part of your small intestine (duodenum). The scope does not interfere with your breathing. Once the scope is in place, the doctor passes a small catheter (a narrow plastic tube) into the ducts to inject dye or contrast material. The dye allows the doctor to take X-ray pictures so that area can be carefully examined. Your blood pressure and pulse are monitored during the ERCP. Depending on what the doctor finds and what treatments can be done, the ERCP lasts about 1½ hours.

**After the Test**

The nurse checks you often for at least 1 hour after the ERCP while the medicine wears off. You may have a mild sore throat and a bloated feeling. This is normal. The medicine given during the test affects your judgment and reflexes. You may feel groggy. Do not drink alcohol. Do not make important decisions. Do not drive or operate machinery until the next day. You must have a responsible adult take you home, or the test will be rescheduled.

You are given written instructions before you leave the GI Lab. You may be asked to take only clear liquids after the ERCP and begin solid foods the next morning. Limit your activity for the next couple of days, with no heavy lifting. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to prevent infection and ask you not to take blood-thinning medicine.

**When to Call the Doctor**

If you note any of the following, contact your doctor:

- Temperature greater than 100.5 degrees F, chills.
- New onset of pain in the abdomen or chest, nausea, vomiting.
- Yellow skin or eyes, dark/tarry stools or dizziness.

**Test Results**

The doctor will discuss the exam results with you or your family on the day of the test. Biopsy results often are ready in about 5 to 7 days after your test. Your doctor will contact you with the biopsy results.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please call your doctor or the GI clinic at 312-695-5620.