

## About Your Colonoscopy

### What is colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a procedure that allows your doctor to clearly see the lining of your colon (large bowel). A flexible tube, about the thickness of your finger, is put into the rectum and moved slowly through the entire colon. A special camera in the tube allows the doctor to see any problem areas in the colon.

### Why is a colonoscopy needed?

A colonoscopy can be done:

- As a screening test for colon cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends colon screening for every adult starting at age 50, sometimes earlier. Ask your doctor when you should be screened.
- To help confirm and study in detail any problems suspected from a patient's X-rays.
- To find out what is causing symptoms such as rectal bleeding or changes in bowel habits (X-rays alone may not find the problem).
- To diagnose and follow the progress of patients with inflammatory bowel disease.
- As a regular follow-up exam for patients with previous polyps, colon cancer, or a family history of colon cancer.

### How do I prepare for the colonoscopy?

For the best possible exam, the colon must be completely empty. Your doctor will give you detailed instructions for a cleansing routine and diet to follow. **Or**, you will be told what time to arrive at the hospital to begin the cleansing routine before your colonoscopy.

### Can I take my medicines?

Most medicines can be taken as usual, but some can interfere with the preparation or the exam. Please talk with your doctor at least a week before the exam. Ask about taking your medicines, especially if you take aspirin products, anticoagulants (blood thinners), arthritis or blood pressure medicines, insulin or iron products.

### What happens during the colonoscopy?

Your doctor will give you medicine through a vein in your arm to help you relax and stay comfortable during the exam. You will lie on your side or on your back while the flexible tube is moved slowly through the large bowel. As the tube is slowly withdrawn, the doctor looks at the lining of the large bowel. You may feel some cramping or gas but the medicine should keep you comfortable. The exam usually takes about 20 minutes.

### What is a polypectomy?

Sometimes polyps are found during a colonoscopy. Polyps are abnormal growths of tissue found on the colon lining. If your doctor thinks a polyp should be removed, a small wire loop or snare will be passed through the tube and the polyp will be cut out. You will not feel this. Most polyps are benign (not cancer). But some may contain an area of cancer or may develop into cancer. Removal of colon polyps is an important way to prevent colon cancer. People who have had a history of polyps may need to have follow-up colonoscopies to check if new polyps have formed. These follow-up exams usually occur in one to five years of your first exam (your doctor will tell you when you need to schedule another exam). Some people who have large polyps or cancerous polyps may need to have surgery. Your doctor will educate and prepare you for this step, if needed.

### What happens after the colonoscopy?

- Your doctor will explain the results to you.
- You may be given oxygen. Oxygen is needed to help with your breathing for a little bit.
- You may have some cramping or bloating because of the air put into the colon during the exam. This should go away quickly with passage of gas.
- Generally, you should be able to eat and drink as usual after the exam.
- If you were given medicines to help you relax during the exam, someone must take you home. For your own safety, please have a friend or family member drive you. **If you do not have a ride home, your procedure may need to be rescheduled.**

### Going home

- You should not drive or operate any machinery for 24 hours. Even if you feel alert, your judgement and reflexes may be slower from the sedative medicine.
- Do not make legally binding decisions for the next 24 hours.
- Do not drink alcohol for the next 24 hours.

### Are there complications of colonoscopy?

Complications after a colonoscopy are rare, but can occur. There is risk for perforation of the bowel (tear in the bowel wall) anytime an instrument is inserted in the intestine. If a biopsy is taken, there is also a risk of bleeding.

#### When should I call the doctor?

Although complications after colonoscopy are not common, it is important to know the early signs of any possible complication. Call the doctor who performed your colonoscopy if you notice:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Fever and chills
- Bloody bowel movement; bleeding can occur several days after polyp removal
- Distended and hard abdomen
- If you have any questions or concerns

### Need more information?

Please talk with your doctor or the office staff if you have questions about the colonoscopy or about costs, billing, and insurance coverage. If you have questions that have not been answered, please discuss them with the nurse or doctor before the exam begins.

