

Preparing for a Colonoscopy – What to Expect?

What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a test to view the inside of our lower digestive tract (colon and rectum). Sometimes it can also show the last part of the small intestine (ileum). During the test, small pieces of tissue may be removed for testing. This is called a biopsy. Small growths, such as polyps, may also be removed. For a successful colonoscopy, your colon needs to be very clean to help your doctor see the colon and any polyps, tumors, bleeding, or anything else abnormal in your colon.

Why is the prep important?

The goal is to have your digestive tract clear of all fecal material, food and anything else that may be present to allow your care team to conduct a complete examination. If you have not successfully completed your bowel preparation, your colonoscopy may be postponed or rescheduled.

How do I prepare for a successful colonoscopy?

Eat a low-fiber diet for five (5) days prior to your colonoscopy. Your doctor will order you a clear liquid diet the day before your procedure. Please do not eat or drink any clear liquids that are red in color (e.g., cranberry juice, red jello) because it may look like you are bleeding during the examination. It is important to drink the prep as recommended and to follow the instructions as written to promote a successful colonoscopy. Please discuss with your doctor what prescribed medications (e.g., blood thinner, blood pressure medication, diabetes medication) you should take the day of the colonoscopy.

Tips for completing the prep:

- To improve the taste of the prep, it can be chilled prior to drinking and you may drink through a straw.
- Call your physician's office if you develop abdominal pain, bloating, or nausea while drinking the prep.
- Watery bowel movements will continue for several hours after completing the bowel prep.
- Be sure to keep drinking water so you do not become dehydrated from the prep.

Results of the prep:

- Your bowel movements will lighten in color as time goes on.
- You will need to look in the toilet after you have a bowel movement to see the color.
- There should not be any solid matter as time goes on.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

- You will need to undress and change into a gown.
- A nurse will get an IV started.
- A doctor or nurse will go over what will happen during the procedure and any risks associated with it.
- Light sedation is administered so someone will need to be available to take you home.
- The colonoscopy should take 30-60 minutes.
- Once the colonoscopy is over you will need time to recover from the sedation before getting dressed and leaving.
- Before leaving, the doctor will review what he or she found during the colonoscopy and discuss next steps, if there are any.
- Take the remainder of the day to rest and recover at home.
- Advance diet slowly.