



Understanding Colonoscopy

A Guide for Patients

Your physician has recommended that you have a screening colonoscopy at Cooley Dickinson Hospital. Our scheduler will call you to arrange an appointment for this procedure once we have received the referral from your physician. If we leave a phone message, please call 413-582-2598 between the hours of 8 am-8 pm as soon as possible so that we can schedule your procedure at a time convenient for you. It is our privilege to be your hospital of choice.

Your physician has determined that a colonoscopy is necessary for further evaluation or treatment of your condition. This flyer has been prepared to help you understand the procedure. It includes answers to questions patients ask more frequently.

Please read it carefully. If you have additional questions, please discuss your questions with the endoscopy nurse or your physician before the examination begins.

What is a colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a procedure that enables your physician to examine the lining of the colon (large bowel) for abnormalities. The procedure is performed by inserting

a flexible tube that is about the thickness of your finger into the anus and advancing the tube slowly into the rectum and colon.

What preparation is required?

The colon must be completely clean for the procedure to be accurate and complete. Your physician will give you detailed instructions regarding the dietary restrictions to be followed and the cleansing routine to be used.

Preparation consists of either consumption of a large volume of a special cleansing solution or several days of clear liquids, laxatives, and enemas prior to the examination. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully. If you do not, the procedure may have to be canceled.

What about my current medications?

Most medications may be continued as usual, but some medications can interfere with the preparation or the examination. Therefore, it is best to inform your physician of your current medications as well as any allergies to medications several days prior to the examination. Aspirin products, arthritis medications, anticoagulants (blood thinners), insulin, and iron products are examples of medications that should be discussed with your physician prior to the examination. You should alert your doctor if you require antibiotics prior to undergoing dental procedures, since you may need antibiotics prior to colonoscopy as well.

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What can be expected during colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is usually well-tolerated and rarely causes much pain. There is often a feeling of pressure, bloating or cramping at times during the procedure. Your doctor may give you medication through a vein to help you relax and better tolerate any discomfort from the procedure. You will be lying on your side or on your back while the colonoscope is advanced slowly through the large intestine. As the colonoscope is slowly withdrawn, the lining is again carefully examined. The procedure usually takes 15 to 60 minutes. In some cases, passage of the colonoscope through the entire colon to its junction with the small intestine cannot be achieved. The physician will decide if further examinations are necessary.

What if the colonoscopy shows something abnormal?

If your doctor thinks an area of the bowel needs to be evaluated in greater detail, a biopsy (a sample of the colon lining) will be performed. This specimen is submitted to the pathology laboratory for analysis. If a colonoscopy is being performed to identify sites of bleeding, the areas of bleeding may be controlled through the colonoscope by injecting certain medications or by coagulation (sealing off bleeding vessels with heat treatment).

If polyps are found, they are generally removed. None of these additional procedures typically produce pain. Remember, the biopsies are taken for many reasons and do not necessarily mean that cancer is suspected.

What are polyps? Why are they removed?

Polyps are abnormal growths from the lining of the colon that vary in size from a tiny dot to several inches. The majority of polyps are benign (noncancerous), but the doctor cannot always tell a benign from a malignant (cancerous) polyp by its outer appearance alone. For this reason, removed polyps are sent for tissue analysis. Removal of colon polyps is an

important means of preventing colorectal cancer.

How are polyps removed?

Tiny polyps may be destroyed by fulguration (burning), but larger polyps are removed by a technique called snare polypectomy. The doctor passes a wire loop (snare) through the colonoscope and severs the attachment of the polyp from the intestinal wall by means of an electrical current. You should feel no pain during the polypectomy.

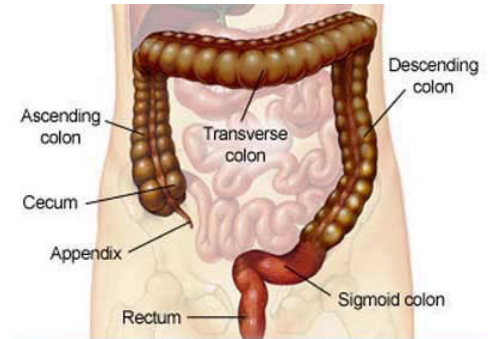
What happens after a colonoscopy?

After colonoscopy, your physician will explain the results to you. If you have been given medications during the procedure, someone must accompany you home from the procedure because of the sedation used during the examination. Even if you feel alert after the procedure, your judgment and reflexes may be impaired by the sedation for the rest of the day, making it unsafe for you to drive or operate any machinery.

You may have some cramping or bloating because of the air introduced to the colon during the examination. This should disappear quickly with passage of gas. Generally, you should be able to eat after leaving the endoscopy, but your doctor may restrict your diet and activities, especially after polypectomy.

What are the possible complications of colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy and polypectomy are generally safe when performed by physicians who have been specially trained and are experienced in these endoscopic procedures. One possible complication is a perforation or tear through the bowel wall that could require major surgery. Bleeding may occur from the site of biopsy or polypectomy. It is usually minor and stops on its own or can be controlled through the colonoscope. Rarely, blood transfusions or major surgery may be required. Other potential risks include a reaction to the sedatives used and complications from



heart or lung disease. Localized irritation of the vein where medications were injected may rarely cause a tender lump lasting several days to a couple of weeks. Applying hot packs or hot moist towels may help relieve discomfort.

Although complications after colonoscopy are uncommon, it is important for you to recognize early signs of any possible complication. Contact the physician who performed the colonoscopy if you notice: severe abdominal pain, fever and chills or rectal bleeding of more than one-half cup. Bleeding can occur several days after polypectomy.

Other helpful information

Because education is an important part of comprehensive medical care, you have been provided with this information to prepare you for this procedure. If you have questions about your need for colonoscopy, alternative tests, the cost of the procedure, methods of billing or insurance coverage, speak to your doctor or your doctor's office staff.

Most endoscopists are highly trained specialists and welcome your questions regarding their credentials and training. If you have questions that have not been answered, please discuss them with the endoscopy nurse or your physician before the examination begins.