

Colonoscopy Fact Sheet

What is a colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy (KOH-luh-NOS-koh-pee) is a test that can prevent colon cancer or find it early when it's easier to treat and cure. Colonoscopies are done in an outpatient setting at a clinic or at a hospital. The test is done by a gastroenterologist or health care provider who has specialized training to find and remove polyps from the colon and check for signs of cancer. Polyps are growths in the colon that may turn into cancer.

A colonoscope is used during a colonoscopy. It is a thin, flexible tube that has a light, camera, and a tool to remove polyps or to collect cells for testing.

Preparation for the Colonoscopy

Before a colonoscopy, the colon must be thoroughly cleansed. This cleaning out process is called bowel prep. If your colon is not completely clean, your health care provider may not be able to clearly see your entire colon. This may lead to missed polyps or cancer. For the bowel prep, you will drink a laxative that causes frequent stools and diarrhea. Consider staying home during this time since you will need to use the bathroom very often.

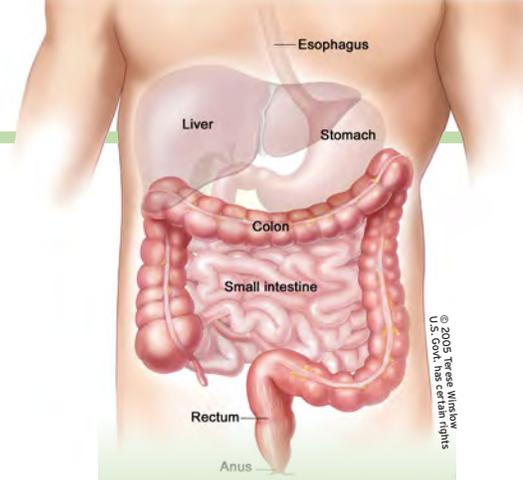
Day of the Colonoscopy

On the day of your colonoscopy, you will be given medicine intravenously that puts you in a light sleep called "conscious sedation." It is likely that you will not feel pain or even remember the procedure. After the colonoscopy, you will wake up in the recovery area and will stay there until you are fully awake. You should plan on being at the health care provider's office for about two hours. It is normal to have mild cramps or gas for several hours after the procedure.

After the Colonoscopy

When you get home, plan to take it easy for the rest of the day. Have an adult helper with you to make sure you are well. If you take care of children, it is best to ask someone to watch them. Do not go to work or do heavy activities like housework. The next day you should be able to do your regular activities again.

While problems after colonoscopy are rare, it's important to know early signs of possible problems. Call your health care provider if you notice severe stomach pain, fever, and chills, or a lot of rectal bleeding. You may have some bleeding for several days after the colonoscopy. Call your health care provider's office if you have any questions or concerns.



A colonoscopy is an examination of the inside of the colon, also known as the large intestine.



A health care provider examines your colon for polyps, which are growths that may develop into cancer.



A clean colon (left) helps the health care provider locate any polyps (right), which can be completely removed during the colonoscopy.

More Information

Medline Plus: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/colonoscopy.html

Cancer Information Service: 1-800-4-cancer (1-800-422-6237)

Washington Colon Cancer STARS: www.colonstars.org

Your Health Care Provider's Office: _____

Washington State Department of
Health
DOH 342-051 October 2012

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