



COLONOSCOPY FACT SHEET

What is a Colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a special test which allows your physician to examine the lining of the colon (large bowel) for abnormal growths such as polyps or cancer.

Who should have a Colonoscopy?

Your Digestive Disease Institute physician may recommend you have a colonoscopy if you experience:

- A change in bowel habits
- Rectal bleeding
- Unexpected abdominal pain
- Inflammatory bowel disease (colitis)

Also, if polyps or tumors are located with a barium enema X-ray or you have a past or family history of colorectal polyps or cancer, you should have a colonoscopy.

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. Most medications may be continued as usual, but some medications can interfere with the preparation or the examination. It is therefore best to inform your physician of your current medications as well as any allergies to medications several days prior to the examination.

How is the procedure performed?

Your doctor may give you medication to help you relax during the procedure. During the colonoscopy, your doctor will look through the colonoscope to see the lining of the bowel. If an abnormal area is found, it is possible to obtain a small biopsy or representative specimen of that area. Also, polyps or growths may be removed during a colonoscopy.

What are polyps and why are they removed?

Polyps are abnormal growths from the lining of the colon which 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.

COLONOSCOPY (continued)

For this reason, polyps are removed by passing special instruments through the colonoscope and then sent for tissue analysis. Removal of the colon polyps is an important means of preventing colorectal cancer.

What happens after Colonoscopy?

The exam usually takes less than an hour. After colonoscopy, your physician will explain the results to you. If you have been given medications during the procedure, you will be observed until most of the effects of sedation have worn off (from 1/2 to 2 hours). You will need someone to drive you home after the procedure.

What are the possible complications of Colonoscopy?

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

Other potential risks may include a perforation or tear through the bowel wall, a reaction to the sedatives used and complications from heart or lung disease.

Your physician can discuss colonoscopy with you in greater detail.