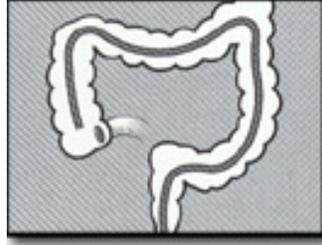


# Colonoscopy



## Sharon R. Roseman, MD

*Practice Limited to Gastroenterology*

701 Broad Street, Suite 411 ♦ Sewickley, PA 15143

PH: 412-749-7160 ♦ FAX: 412-749-7388

Your doctor has recommended that you have a medical procedure called a colonoscopy to evaluate or treat your condition. This pamphlet will help you understand how a colonoscopy can benefit you and what you can expect before, during, and after this procedure.

### What is a Colonoscopy?

The term "colonoscopy" means looking inside the colon. It is a procedure performed by a gastroenterologist, a well-trained subspecialist.

The colon, or large bowel, is the last portion of your digestive or GI tract. It starts at the cecum, which attaches to the end of the small intestine, and it ends at the rectum and anus. The colon is a hollow tube, about five feet long, and its main function is to store unabsorbed food products prior to their elimination.

The main instrument that is used to look inside the colon is the colonoscope, which is a long, thin, flexible tube with a tiny video camera and a light on the end. By adjusting the various controls on the colonoscope, the gastroenterologist can carefully guide the instrument in any direction to look at the inside of the colon. The high quality picture from the colonoscope is shown on a TV monitor, and gives a clear, detailed view.

Colonoscopy is more precise than an X-ray. This procedure also allows other instruments to be passed through in order to perform biopsies, remove polyps or inject solutions. In this way, colonoscopy may help to avoid surgery or to better define what type of surgery may need to be done.

A shorter version of the colonoscope is called a sigmoidoscope, an instrument used to screen the lower part of the large bowel only. The colonoscope, however, is long enough to inspect all of the large bowel and even part of the small intestine.

Colonoscopy is a safe and effective way to evaluate problems such as blood loss, pain, and changes in bowel habits such as chronic diarrhea or abnormalities that may have first been detected by other tests. Colonoscopy can also identify and treat active bleeding from the colon.

Colonoscopy is also an important way to check for colon cancer and to treat colon polyps - abnormal growths on the inside lining of the intestine. Polyps vary in size and shape and, while most are not cancerous, some may turn into cancer. However, it is not possible to tell just by looking at a polyp if it is malignant or potentially malignant. This is why colonoscopy is often used to remove polyps, a technique called a polypectomy. Colonoscopy is not a perfect test, and approximately 1 out of 2000 patients will have polyps or cancers missed during colonoscopy.

### How Do I Prepare for the Procedure?

There are important steps that you must take to prepare for the procedure. First, be prepared to give a complete list of all the medicines you are taking, as well as any allergies you have to drugs or other substances. Your physician will also want to know if you have any other medical conditions that may need special attention before, during, or after the colonoscopy.

You will be given instructions in advance that will outline what you should and should not do in preparation for colonoscopy. **Be sure to read and follow these instructions.** To obtain the full benefits of the exam, the colon must be clean and free of stool. Various methods can be used to help cleanse the bowel. Often, a liquid preparation designed to stimulate bowel movements is given by mouth, which may cause bloating. Other laxative preparations, such as castor oil, may also be used. Additional approaches include special diets or the use of enemas. Whatever method or combination of methods that is recommended for you, be sure to follow instructions as directed.

Usually the patient drinks only clear liquids and eats no food for the day before the exam. Colonoscopy can be done in either a hospital or outpatient office. You'll be asked to sign a form that gives your consent to the procedure and states that you understand what is involved. If there is anything you don't understand, ask for more information.

### **What Can You Expect During a Colonoscopy?**

During the procedure, everything will be done to ensure your comfort. An intravenous, or IV, line will be inserted to give you medication to make you relaxed and drowsy. The drug will enable you to remain awake and cooperative, but it may prevent you from remembering much of the experience.

Once you are fully relaxed, your doctor will do a rectal exam with a gloved, lubricated finger; then the lubricated colonoscope will be gently inserted.

As the scope is slowly and carefully passed, you may feel as if you need to move your bowels, and because air is introduced to help advance the scope, you may feel some cramping or fullness. Generally, however, there is little or no discomfort. If a polyp is encountered, a thin wire snare is used to lasso it and electrocautery (electrical heat) is applied to painlessly remove it.

The time needed for colonoscopy will vary, but on the average, the procedure takes about 30 minutes. Afterwards, you'll be cared for in a recovery area until the effects of the medication have worn off. At this time, your doctor will inform you about the results of your colonoscopy and provide any additional information that you need to know. You'll also be given instructions about how soon you can eat and drink, plus other guidelines for resuming your normal routine. Due to the sedation provided during the procedure, you will not be allowed to drive a car or operate heavy machinery until the following day.

### **Alternative Tests**

Alternative tests to colonoscopy include a barium enema or other types of x-rays that examine the colon. These exams, however, do not allow direct viewing of the colon or for the ability to perform biopsies or remove polyps.

### **What are the Possible Complications from a Colonoscopy?**

Although colonoscopy is a safe procedure, complications can sometimes occur. These include perforation - a puncture of the colon wall, which could require surgical repair.

When a polyp removal or a biopsy is performed, hemorrhage (heavy bleeding) may result and sometimes require blood transfusion or reinsertion of the colonoscope to control the bleeding. Be sure to discuss any specific concerns you may have about the procedure with your doctor.

### **What Can You Expect After Your Colonoscopy?**

Occasionally, minor problems may persist, such as bloating, gas, or mild cramping. These symptoms should disappear in 24 hours or less. You should plan on resting for the remainder of the day. This means not driving for the remainder of the day, so you'll need to have a family member or friend take you home.

**Colonoscopy is an effective technique for evaluating and, in many cases, improving your digestive health.**

## **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

1. No food after midnight.
2. You may have clear liquids up to 4 hours prior to the exam, then nothing by mouth for 4 hours except for your medications and prep with a small sip of water
3. **DO NOT SKIP ANY OF YOUR USUAL MEDICATIONS.**
4. If you take insulin or blood thinners, be sure you have received specific instructions regarding these medications. **DO NOT STOP THESE MEDICATIONS ON YOUR OWN!**
5. Make arrangements to have a friend or family member drive you home following the procedure.
6. Please arrive promptly.
7. Please dress comfortably. Leave earrings and other jewelry and any valuables at home
8. Bring all your medications with you in their original containers.
9. If you have HMO health insurance, please be sure you have the proper referral authorization from your primary care physician for this visit.
10. If you have any questions, please call the office at 412-749-7160.

**IF YOUR COLONOSCOPY HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR SCREENING (YOU HAVE NO SYMPTOMS WITH YOUR BOWELS SUCH AS CHANGE IN BOWEL HABITS, DIARRHEA, CONSTIPATION, BLEEDING, ETC.) AND THE DOCTOR FINDS A POLYP OR TISSUE THAT HAS TO BE REMOVED DURING THE PROCEDURE, THIS COLONOSCOPY IS NO LONGER CONSIDERED A SCREENING PROCEDURE, IT IS CONSIDERED A SURGICAL PROCEDURE AND YOUR INSURANCE BENEFITS MAY CHANGE. PLEASE CHECK WITH YOUR INSURANCE**