Fiberoptic Bronchoscopy

What is a Fiberoptic Bronchoscopy?

A fiberoptic bronchoscopy is a procedure that allows your physician to examine the breathing passages (airways) of the lungs. This procedure can either be for diagnostic reasons, to find out more about a problem or for therapeutic reasons, to treat an existing problem.

The instrument used to examine the airways is called a bronchoscope. A bronchoscope is a small flexible lighted tube that has an eyepiece that allows your doctor to look inside your lungs.

Why do I Need a Bronchoscopy?

There are many reasons for having a bronchoscopy. Common reasons why a bronchoscopy is needed include:

- An abnormal chest x-ray or CT scan that requires a more thorough inspection. The abnormal chest x-ray or CT scan can include a "spot" or mass, pneumonia or other unexplained changes. Fluid or tissue samples are taken from the area and sent to a lab to find out the cause of the lung spot.

- Symptoms such as a persistent cough, coughing up blood, abnormal or noisy breathing sounds or shortness of breath.

- Continuing lung collapse (atelectasis) is also another reason for a bronchoscopy. Thick mucous, a foreign body or a tumor may obstruct the passage of air. If possible, the physician will remove the obstruction and clear the airways.

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. If you are on any blood thinners, your medication will be stopped prior to your procedure. Do not take any of your medications the morning of your procedure unless otherwise instructed by the physician.

Your physician will also want to know if you have any other medical conditions that may need special attention before, during, or after the bronchoscopy.

Blood tests and an EKG will be necessary prior to your bronchoscopy.

Do not eat or drink anything after midnight before your procedure. Not even water. It is important that your stomach is empty prior to your procedure.

You will be given instructions in advance that will outline what you should and should not do in preparation for your bronchoscopy. Be sure to read and follow these instructions.
What Can You Expect During a Bronchoscopy?

During the procedure, everything will be done to ensure your comfort. Prior to your procedure, you will receive a local anesthetic spray to numb the back of your throat. This will help prevent coughing and gagging during the procedure. 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. You will be connected to a heart monitor.

Once you are fully relaxed, your doctor will insert the bronchoscope through your nose or mouth, and then advance slowly down the back of your throat into your airways.

During the procedure, the doctor may take a sample of fluid or tissue for further testing. This is done by passing tiny brushes, forceps or needles through the bronchoscope. Saline is also passed through the tube. This washes the lung and allows the doctor to collect samples inside the air sacs.

During the procedure, you may feel short of breath, but enough air is getting into your lungs. You will receive extra oxygen throughout the procedure and your doctor will be monitoring your oxygen level. You will also have difficulty speaking normally once the bronchoscope passes through your vocal cords. This is normal and resolves once the bronchoscope is removed.

The time needed for a bronchoscopy will vary, but on the average, the procedure takes about 30 -45 minutes.

What Happens After a Bronchoscopy?

After your bronchoscopy, you will be cared for in a recovery area until the effects of the medication have worn off (approximately 1-2 hours). At this time, your doctor will order a chest x-ray to check for a pneumothorax and bleeding. A pneumothorax is a condition in which air or gas collects in the space around the lung. Your blood pressure, pulse and breathing rate will be checked prior to your discharge.

Upon discharge, you will need to have someone drive you home because of the lingering effects of sedation. You should plan on resting for the remainder of the day. This means not driving for the remainder of the day. Due to the numbing of your throat, you will be instructed not to eat or drink for approximately 2 hours after the procedure.

For the first few days you may have a sore throat, cough and hoarseness. This is normal. However, you should contact the doctor or go to the emergency room if you have increasing chest pain, shortness of breath or if you cough up more than a few teaspoons of blood.

You will be scheduled for a follow-up office visit to discuss the results of your bronchoscopy.