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Colonoscopy

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What is colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a procedure a doctor uses to look at the inside of the colon and rectum with a **colonoscope**, which is a long, flexible tube about the width of a finger with a light and small video camera on the end. It's put in through the anus and into the rectum and colon. Special instruments can be passed through the colonoscope to biopsy (sample) or remove any suspicious-looking areas such as polyps, if needed.

(**Note:** This test is different from a virtual colonoscopy (also known as *CT colonography*), which is a type of [CT scan](#)¹.)

Why do you need a colonoscopy?

There are a few reasons you might need a colonoscopy:

To detect (check for) polyps or cancer in the colon and rectum

This test can be used to [screen for colorectal cancer](#)²

If you have had colon or rectal cancer, colonoscopy can also be used to detect new tumors.

Because you are having problems in the colon or rectum

Colonoscopy can also be used to look for the causes of [signs or symptoms that might be from colon or rectal cancer](#)³

Is a colonoscopy prep different for males and females?

The colonoscopy prep instructions a person gets is based on guidelines that your health care provider follows. They may have preferences that affect what bowel prep is used, based on their experience and feedback they may get from patients about the prep, such as how easy or difficult it was to follow, how long the prep takes to do, and the cost of the supplies for the test. Your sex or gender don't usually make a difference in what prep is prescribed for you.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

Right before the test starts, you'll likely be given a sedative (into a vein, or IV) to make you feel relaxed and sleepy during the procedure. For most people, this medicine makes them unable to remember the procedure afterward.

can and can't do in the hours after the test. Before you leave, you will be told when you can start taking medicines again that may have been stopped for the procedure.

Because air is pumped into the colon and rectum during the test, you might feel bloated, have gas pains, or have cramping for a while after the test until the air passes out.

If biopsies were done as part of the procedure, the results will typically be available within a few days, although some tests on the biopsy samples might take longer. You will need to follow up with your doctor after the procedure to get your results.

Possible complications of colonoscopy

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