Colonoscopy
Dartmouth General Hospital

What is a Colonoscopy?
This is an exam of the large bowel (also known as the large intestine or colon). The doctor uses a special tube that bends (endoscope) and has a small light and camera on one end to look for any changes on the inside of your large bowel.

How do I get ready for my colonoscopy?
It is VERY important that you get ready by doing these things:

• If you will be getting sedation, you must arrange for a responsible adult to take you home and care for you.

• You may wish to take a day off work when taking your bowel prep [medicines to clean out your bowel]. You
should also plan a day off work for the day of your test. Most people can return to work the day after their test.

• Your bowel **MUST** be empty. To carry out this test, the bowel must be free of any stool and fluids that may make it hard to see the walls on the inside. If your bowel is not cleaned the right way, the exam will be less accurate or impossible to finish. The doctor will give you special instructions on cleaning your bowel, we urge you to follow them.

• Drink 3 to 4 Litres (quarts) of **CLEAR** fluid such as water, sports drinks (that aren’t red in colour), light coloured soft drinks (Sprite, gingerale, 7up, etc.), Tea (no milk), apple juice, or clear soup broth – as well as your bowel prep liquid. This will make sure that your bowel is as clean as possible.

• Do not eat seeds or kernels for 2 weeks before your test.

• Drink only **CLEAR** fluids on the day of the test.

• If you are diabetic and on medicine and/or insulin, talk with your doctor. You may need special instructions on taking these medicines before your test.

• Take all heart, blood pressure, or breathing medicine on the day of the test.

• If you need antibiotics for tests or dental work, call your specialist before the test.

• Talk with the doctor if you are taking blood thinners, such as ASA (Asprin®), Asprin® - containing products, or Warfarin.

• Tell the doctor about any drug allergies you may have.

Notes

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• Bring a list of your medicines to the test.
• Do not wear any jewelry or bring any valuables with you.
• Do not wear any perfumed products.
• Please call your specialist at least 72 hours before your exam if you need to cancel this test. This will give us time to book another patient.

Where do I go?
You will be given the date and time for your test. Please arrive 30 minutes before your test time. Go to Patient Registration, Main Floor, Dartmouth General Hospital. Bring your Health Card with you.

What will happen when I get there?
• An intravenous (IV) will be started in your arm.
• We will give you medicine through your IV to ease pain and help you relax just before the test is started.
• The scope will be put into your rectum (back passage) by the specialist.
• The bowel will be inflated with air to help the doctor get a better look at the lining of the bowel. This may give you some mild cramping or pain. The air may feel like gas pain or like you want to move your bowels.
• The doctor may wish to remove a polyp (see next section) or take a tissue sample during the exam. This is painless and not a cause for worry.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk them over with your doctor and/or nurse, or call your specialist. We are all here to help you.
• The test will take 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Expect to spend about 30-45 minutes in the recovery room after that.

What are polyps and why are they removed?
• Polyps are small pieces of tissue protruding out of the bowel wall (often look like a mushroom).
• Most often, if polyps are seen, they are removed. If left alone, they may bleed or become cancerous.

How are polyps removed?
• They are removed at the time of the test by running an electrical current through a wire wrapped around the polyp.
• Removing polyps (polypectomy) or taking tissue samples is painless, as the inside of your bowel has no nerve endings.

The test has ended… Now what?
• You may feel the urge to have a bowel movement or pass gas. This is due to the air that was put into your bowel during the test. Please try to pass the gas. This feeling shouldn’t last long.
• After a 30 to 45 minute stay in the recovery room, you may leave with your “designated driver” and caregiver.
• You may notice traces of blood in your first couple of bowel movements. This is normal when a polyp is removed or a tissue sample taken. But, if the bleeding is a large amount, does not go away, or goes along with dizziness, call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room.

I’ve had sedation, what should I know?
• A responsible adult must take you home and care for you.
• The person who is taking you home must come to the Day Surgery Unit at the Dartmouth General Hospital.
• Do not walk or take the bus home. You may take a taxi only if you go with a responsible adult who can help you if needed.
• Do not sign any legal or important papers for the next 24 hours.
• Do not drink any alcohol for the next 24 hours.
• Do not drive a car or run any heavy machinery for the next 24 hours.
• Do not give care to others for the next 24 hours.

What should I know about?
A Colonoscopy is a minor procedure with very little risk involved when done by a trained professional, but, as with any test, there are some things you should know about:
• There is about a 1 in 1000 to a 1 in 2000 chance of having a tear [perforation] through the bowel wall. Surgery may be needed to fix the tear.
• The test will take 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Expect to spend about 30-45 minutes in the recovery room after that.

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• There is about a 1 in 1000 to a 1 in 2000 chance of having a tear [perforation] through the bowel wall. Surgery may be needed to fix the tear.
• There is a 1 in 200 to 500 chance that bleeding may happen if a polyp has been removed. There is a 1 in 10,000 chance bleeding may happen if a tissue sample was taken. The bleeding may stop on its own but may also need more treatment.
• There is a 1 in 1.8 million chance of getting an infection from the equipment used for the test, but this has not been reported in Canada.
• Small polyps may be missed up to 5-10% of the time, mostly if the bowel prep was poor.
• Some patients may develop a problem linked to the sedatives or existing heart or lung disease. Please tell your specialist if you’ve had any trouble with these types of issues in the past. Some may also notice soreness where the IV was inserted. Do not worry if a lump forms at the IV site as this should go away on its own over a few weeks.
• Sometimes the procedure cannot be finished for technical reasons, or if the bowel has not been cleaned out the right way before the test.
• Painkillers and blood thinners can make you bleed more. We suggest that you stay away from these drugs for a week after the test if a polyp was removed or a tissue sample taken.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk them over with your doctor and/or nurse, or call your specialist. We are all here to help you.

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