

What is a Colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a procedure that allows your gastroenterologist to examine the lining of your large intestine (colon) and rectum using a flexible tube with a camera on the end, called a colonoscope.

The procedure is performed to investigate symptoms such as rectal bleeding, persistent diarrhoea or constipation, abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss, or changes in bowel habits. It is also used for bowel cancer screening, surveillance of inflammatory bowel disease, and removal of polyps.

Bowel Preparation

Proper bowel preparation is essential for a successful colonoscopy. Your bowel must be completely clean for your doctor to see clearly.

You will be given specific bowel preparation instructions. This typically involves:

Days Before the Procedure:

- Follow a low-fibre diet (avoid nuts, seeds, wholegrains, skins of vegetables and fruits) for 2-3 days before
- Stop iron supplements 7 days before (if taking)
- Most medications can be taken as usual with a sip of water including on the day of the procedure
- **Important: Please advise us if you are taking diabetic medications, blood thinners, or weight loss medications as these may need to be adjusted before your procedure. Most diabetic medications should not be taken on the day of the procedure. Extended fasting instructions may be given for weight loss medications**
- **Important for women: Bowel preparation may reduce the effectiveness of birth control tablets. Use alternative contraception methods for the remaining menstrual cycle**

Day Before the Procedure:

- Switch to a clear liquid diet (water, clear broth, clear juice without pulp, black tea or coffee, jelly, ice blocks) after an early breakfast
- Avoid red or purple coloured liquids
- Take the bowel preparation solution as directed - timing is important
- Stay well hydrated - drink plenty of clear fluids
- Expect frequent bowel movements - stay near a toilet

Day of the Procedure:

- Complete the third dose of bowel preparation
- Do not eat or drink anything (**do not chew gum or suck on lollies**) for at least 2 hours before your admission time - this is the time you are expected to arrive at the hospital, not the time of your procedure
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing

During the Procedure

The procedure typically takes 20-30 minutes. You will be given sedation to help you relax and minimise discomfort during the examination. The colonoscope will be gently inserted through your rectum and advanced through your colon. Carbon dioxide is typically used to inflate the colon for better visualisation. Your doctor may take tissue samples (biopsies) for laboratory analysis or remove polyps during the procedure if found.

After the Procedure

Immediately After

- You will be monitored in the recovery area until the sedation wears off
- You may experience bloating, cramping, or gas - this is normal and will pass
- You may pass some gas or have mild rectal bleeding (especially if biopsies were taken or polyps removed)
- You can usually resume your normal diet unless advised otherwise
- Your doctor will discuss preliminary findings with you before discharge and give you a copy of your report

Important Post-Procedure Instructions

CRITICAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS:

- **You MUST have a responsible adult pick you up and stay with you for 24 hours after the procedure. You are not permitted to take a taxi or rideshare service, public transport, walk or drive yourself home after the procedure**
- **DO NOT drive, operate machinery, or make important decisions for 24 hours after sedation**
- **DO NOT drink alcohol for 24 hours after the procedure**
- **DO NOT sign legal documents or make important decisions for 24 hours**
- Avoid strenuous activity for the rest of the day
- Take the rest of the day off work
- Drink plenty of fluids to rehydrate

Possible Risks and Complications

Colonoscopy is generally a safe procedure, but like all medical procedures, it carries some risks. These include:

Common (usually minor):

- Bloating, cramping, and gas (temporary)
- Mild rectal bleeding, especially after biopsy or polyp removal
- Nausea
- Reaction to sedation (drowsiness, dizziness)
- Dehydration from bowel preparation

Rare but serious:

- Perforation (tear in the bowel wall)
- Significant bleeding requiring intervention
- Infection
- Adverse reaction to sedation or anaesthetic
- Post-polypectomy syndrome (inflammation after polyp removal)
- Cardiovascular events (rare, more common in patients with existing heart conditions)

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Contact your doctor or go to the emergency department immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Severe abdominal pain or cramping that doesn't improve
- Heavy rectal bleeding or passing large clots
- Fever (temperature above 38°C) or chills
- Severe chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Dizziness, weakness, or fainting
- Vomiting (particularly if persistent)
- Distended or firm abdomen

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns before or after your procedure, please contact:

Gastro Practice Melbourne

Phone: (03) 8488 8822

Email: admin@gastropractice.com.au

***In case of emergency outside business hours,
please attend your nearest emergency department or call 000.***