

Q&A: What to expect for your first colonoscopy

What can I expect in the days leading up to my procedure?

The day or two before your colonoscopy, you will be given medication to help “clean” out the colon and will be on a clear liquid diet. You should be prepared to be near a bathroom during this time.

Will I be sedated?

You will only be lightly sedated but will be given a medication that keeps you from feeling pain and gives you amnesia about the procedure itself. This sedation is not as deep as the type of anesthesia you would experience for invasive surgery. When you “wake up,” you may be slightly groggy, but most people feel fine and experience no effects after.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

During the colonoscopy, the doctor will place a long flexible tube through the anus into the rectum and throughout the colon. The doctor then uses gas to inflate the colon and water to rinse areas as needed, so they can view the colon’s walls. A camera and a light at the end of the tube allow the doctor to see and record the rectum and colon. If the doctor sees a polyp, they will use a wire snare to cut the polyp off at the base. A basket pulls the polyp out and is sent to the pathologist to examine for signs of cancer. A polyp is a tissue growth that grows inside the large intestine or colon. Most are not dangerous, but some can develop into cancer over time.

How long will the procedure take?

The procedure itself only takes about 30 minutes, but with the preparation and recovery period, you will be back in the procedure area for about two hours.

How soon will my results be available, and what can I expect as a follow-up to my colonoscopy?

If your colonoscopy was normal, your doctor might tell you the same day. If you had any polyps or other abnormal findings, your results may take up to a week to come back, and you should expect a phone call or message from your doctor.

A colonoscopy is recommended every 10 years. If you have polyps or other abnormal results, more frequent colonoscopies may be needed. Talk to your doctor about your colonoscopy results to find out when your next procedure is recommended.



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