

Common Questions about Colonoscopy

How long does the colonoscopy take?

The colonoscopy takes about 20 to 30 minutes.

Will the colonoscopy hurt?

Although you're given medicine (conscious sedation) before the test, most people have very little pain or discomfort during the colonoscopy. Very few have so much pain that the doctor has to stop.

Air is pumped into your colon during the colonoscopy so it's normal to feel like you need to pass gas. You may have some bloating, cramping, pressure, and nausea.

What is conscious sedation?

Conscious sedation means that the medicine you may be given before a colonoscopy will relax you and sometimes it will even make you fall asleep. If you do fall asleep, you will still wake up very easily. It is **not** the same as the medicine you are given before an operation (general anaesthetic).

You may feel the same after you're given the medicine, but the medicine is still working. Your concentration and coordination may be affected for a few hours. You are also legally impaired for 24 hours after the colonoscopy. This means you can't drive yourself home—a responsible adult must drive you home. If you don't want the sedation, please talk to the doctor or nurse.

How many days off work should I take for my colonoscopy?

Because of the effects of the preparation (prep) you have to drink for the colonoscopy, many people take the day or half the day before the test off. This is because you need to be near a bathroom because the prep will cause you to have many watery bowel movements soon after you drink it.

Because you likely will be given conscious sedation you can't work or drive for 24 hours after the procedure.

What should I eat after my colonoscopy?

You can eat your normal diet after your colonoscopy. If you are feeling sick to your stomach or are bloated after your colonoscopy, start with water, juice, or soup.

How will I feel the first 24 hours after my colonoscopy?

You may:

- have cramping or bloating (this should go away as you pass gas)
- have loose, watery stools
- feel sick to your stomach or light-headedness from the medicine

Make sure to rest after the colonoscopy. Don't do any strenuous activity and heavy exercise (like jogging).

When would I need to see a doctor?

Go to the emergency department right away or call 9-1-1 if:

- you have very bad pain in your abdomen that started after the test
- you have a temperature over 38 °C/100.4 °F
- you are bleeding from the rectum (other than spotting)
- you faint

I have diabetes. Do I need to adjust my pills or insulin?

The doctor or nurse where you are having your test will tell you how to adjust your pills or insulin before the test. If you are on insulin, you will be told to see your family doctor, diabetes specialist, or diabetes centre about adjusting your insulin before the colonoscopy. Make sure you understand these instructions.

Remember to check your blood sugar more often when preparing for the colonoscopy and after the colonoscopy if you are not eating your normal diet. If you have any questions call the place where you're having the test.

I plan to travel after my colonoscopy. Can I still go?

Travelling (air travel or long-distance travel) isn't recommended within 2 weeks of your colonoscopy. If you have a trip planned, try to schedule your colonoscopy after you return.

Can I still have a colonoscopy during my period (menstrual cycle)?

Yes, you can. You can use a sanitary napkin or tampon as needed.

To learn more about the bowel prep or colonoscopy, please contact:
Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 (LINK)

To learn more about colorectal cancer screening, visit www.screeningforlife.ca