

Common Questions about Preparing Your Bowel for a Colonoscopy

Preparing for your colonoscopy starts at home by going on a clear liquid diet and drinking the bowel prep solution (often called “prep”) the day before your test. Preparing your bowel (colon) so that it is clean for your colonoscopy is important so that the doctor (endoscopist) can look for any abnormalities (like growths or signs of cancer).

What is a clear liquid diet?

A clear liquid diet means that you should only drink liquids you can see through. Some examples are water, apple juice, plain broth and coffee (with no cream). Liquids like milk and orange juice are not clear liquids. Don't drink red liquids, because the dye can be mistaken for blood. Your colonoscopy facility will give you more information before the colonoscopy.

What do I need to know about the bowel “prep” solution?

The prep is a very strong laxative that will cause you to have frequent liquid, watery stools. Your facility will tell you which prep to purchase (cost is usually \$20-30). To make the prep easier to drink and to get the best results, you should drink the prep in split-doses. This means you will drink the prep in 2 amounts at different times. Your facility will tell you about the times you should start drinking the prep.

What can I do to make the prep easier to drink and remove the aftertaste?

You can:

- Put the prep in the fridge after it's mixed to chill it may help it taste better
- Drink the prep through a straw and place the straw far back in your mouth
- Drink flavoured liquids, such as Gatorade® and PowerAde® (any color but red)
- Chew (but don't swallow) gum, suck on hard candies, or brush your teeth

I'm not a very big person. Does this mean I can drink less prep?

The amount of prep you need to drink doesn't depend on your weight, body size, or height. If you don't drink all of the prep to clean your colon, the endoscopist may not be able to see the inside of your colon and you may have to reschedule your procedure and do the prep again.

I drank all the prep but haven't gone to the bathroom yet. What should I do?

Everyone responds to the bowel prep solution differently. Bowel movements start from 1 to 3 hours or longer. Drink enough clear fluid to help your bowels move. **If you have taken all the bowel prep solution and are still having solid stool you may need to reschedule your colonoscopy and use a different type of bowel prep solution. Please contact your facility if this happens.**

What should I do if I feel sick to my stomach or throw up drinking the prep?

You may take a break from drinking the prep for 30 to 60 minutes. Drinking gingerale may help to settle your stomach. It may also help if you drink the prep slower, but it is important to keep drinking the prep to completely clean your colon. You can take an anti-nausea medication like Gravol[®] (dimenhydrinate), as directed on the box. If you think you threw up more than 75% of the prep, if your stool is still dark, thick or solid, call your facility. They may tell you to reschedule.

I felt very cold well while drinking the prep. Is this normal?

Yes, some people feel “chilled” during or after drinking the prep. Drinking a large amount of cold fluid in a short time period will change your body temperature. It may help if you drink the prep at room temperature or drink hot clear liquids in between drinking the prep.

Can I take my regular medicine while drinking the bowel prep solution?

You can continue taking most types of medicine while drinking the prep and on the day of your colonoscopy. You will be told by the facility nurse if you have to stop a medicine during the prep or the day of the test. Vitamins and herbs don't absorb properly without food, so don't take them while doing the prep.

You should take your medicine either 2 hours before or 2 hours after drinking the prep to make sure it is absorbed.

If you take blood thinners or antithrombotics, or diabetic medication or insulin, tell the doctor or nurse at the facility. The dosage may need to be adjusted or stopped before your colonoscopy. Some examples of blood thinners or antithrombotics are: Aspirin[®], Plavix[®], Pradax[®] and Coumadin[®] or Warfarin[®].

If you aren't sure about your medicine please call your colonoscopy facility.

For more information about bowel prep or colonoscopy, please contact:
Health Link Tel: 1-866-408-5465 (LINK)

For more information about colorectal cancer screening, visit:
www.screeningforlife.ca