

Frequently Asked Questions about Colonoscopy

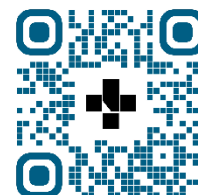
Colonoscopy test: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

December 2023

This FAQ compliments the colonoscopy patient education video series, which answers many common questions about your colonoscopy procedure.

Colonoscopy patient education video series

The AHS colonoscopy video series is available at myhealth.alberta.ca/colonoscopy or by scanning this QR code.



This video series includes four short videos titled:

- [Video 1: What is a colonoscopy and why do I need one?](#)
- [Video 2: What to expect during and after your colonoscopy](#)
- [Video 3: Your 5-day guide for your colonoscopy using a 4-litre bowel preparation](#)
- [Video 4: Colorectal cancer screening](#)

- To find out more about colonoscopy, visit the related resources section of ahs.ca/colonoscopy or speak with your healthcare provider.
- To find out more about colorectal cancer screening, visit screeningforlife.ca.

Video 1: [What is a colonoscopy and why do I need one?](#)

What is a colonoscopy?

- A colonoscopy lets your doctor see the inside lining of the rectum and colon. This test is done using a colonoscope which is a long, thin, flexible tube with a light and camera on the end.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information about colonoscopy in Video 1.

Why have I been referred for a colonoscopy?

- There are three main reasons to have a colonoscopy. The first is for follow-up after an abnormal FIT result or to check on specific symptoms. The second is for monitoring after colorectal treatments. And the third is to screen for colorectal cancer. Screening means looking for early signs of cancer, in people who feel well and have no symptoms.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information on why you may have been referred for a colonoscopy in Video 1.

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I need to reschedule my colonoscopy appointment. Who do I call?

- Call the clinic where your appointment is scheduled as soon as possible. They will reschedule a new date and time for you.

Can I be on a waitlist for a colonoscopy?

- To know whether a waitlist is available, call the clinic where your appointment is scheduled. This can differ depending on each clinic's processes.

Video 2: What to expect during and after your colonoscopy

What should I expect during my colonoscopy?

- Your colonoscopy will be done in a procedure room with a doctor and one to two nurses. Sedation medicine will be offered at the beginning of the test to make you comfortable. The test begins with a rectal exam. Next your doctor will then insert the colonoscope into the rectum. The doctor will slowly move the colonoscope all the way through your colon. If anything abnormal is found, it may be removed with a small tool in the colonoscope and sent to the lab for testing. There are no pain receptors in the colon so this shouldn't hurt.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information about what to expect during and after your colonoscopy in Video 2.

Does a colonoscopy hurt?

- A colonoscopy is generally easy to tolerate. It's common to have minor discomfort and pressure as the doctor moves the colonoscope around the corners of your colon. Most patients choose to have sedation and a pain medication to help them relax during the test.
- If you have any concerns or questions, speak with your nurse or doctor to discuss how to best arrange your care.

What kinds of sedation medicine may be given during my colonoscopy?

- **It is your choice whether to have sedation or not.** If you choose to have sedation, a combination of sedation and pain medicines will be given to help you relax during your test. To discuss exactly which medicines may be offered speak with your colonoscopy doctor.
- [Learn more](#) about sedation.
- **Reminder:** For at least 8 hours after getting sedation avoid the following activities:



Do not
drive a car



Do not
drink
alcohol



Do not
operate heavy
machinery or
power tools



Do not
sign legal
or financial
documents

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Will I have a bowel movement (poop) or pass gas during my colonoscopy?

- It is normal to pass a small amount of stool or gas during the procedure. Your colonoscopy team will be prepared to handle it discreetly and professionally.

Can I have a colonoscopy if I am menstruating?

- Yes. You can have a colonoscopy during your menstrual period. You can wear your underwear and a menstrual pad until right before the start of the test, or you may use a tampon (that can remain in during the test).

Can I ask for a female doctor to do my colonoscopy?

- Call the clinic where your appointment is scheduled to discuss how to best adjust your care.

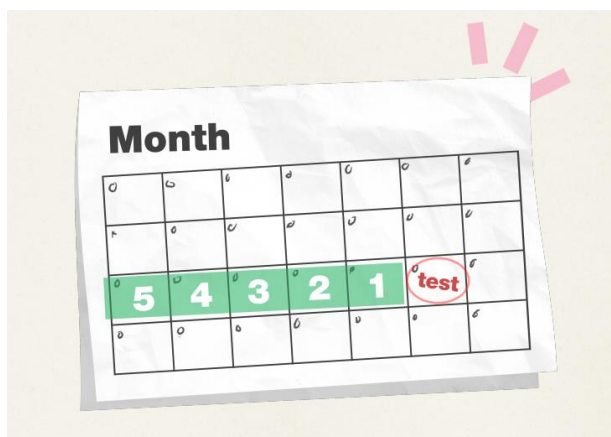
What should I expect after my colonoscopy?

- After your colonoscopy, you'll be taken to a recovery area to rest. Before you leave the clinic, information about your test and future care will be shared with you.
- The person who'll be accompanying you home will need to come into the clinic to pick you up.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information about what to expect during and after your colonoscopy in Video 2.

Video 3: Your 5-day guide for your colonoscopy using a 4-litre bowel preparation

Do I need to do any preparation before my colonoscopy?

- Yes. Getting ready for a colonoscopy takes 5 days.



Detailed instructions will be shared with you that you will need to follow. You will begin by changing your diet. This will include eating a low fibre diet for several days, followed by a clear fluid diet.

You will also drink a bowel preparation laxative solution. It is very important you follow the exact dose (volume) and timing outlined in your instructions.

- You will need to arrange to have someone pick you up the day of your test. You cannot drive yourself home.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information on how to prepare for a colonoscopy in Video 3.

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Where and how do I get my bowel preparation laxative (bowel prep)?

- When you receive your appointment instructions a specific bowel prep (that is right for you) will be recommended.
- Your recommended bowel prep will be available at most pharmacies. It is not a prescription medicine, so it is not usually covered by benefit plans. You should purchase your bowel prep at least 5 days before your colonoscopy. Only use the bowel prep recommended for you with your appointment information. **Do not substitute or mix different bowel prep products.**
- The 4-litre bowel preps (such as Colyte™ or PegLyte™) **cost about \$30 to \$40.**

How does the 4-litre bowel prep work?

- The 4-litre bowel prep is a combination of polyethylene glycol (PEG) and electrolytes. It cleans out the bowel before a medical procedure, such as a colonoscopy. It works by increasing the amount of water your bowel (or colon or large intestine) absorbs. This softens the stool, making it easier to have a bowel movement. It also increases pressure, which prompts the muscles in your bowel to move stool. It belongs to a group of medicines called laxatives.
- It is important to drink the specific type of bowel prep recommended for you by your healthcare provider. Your bowel prep will be based on your medical needs (including your medical history and daily medicines).

Can I drink a smaller amount of bowel prep? Or can I just take a pill instead?

- It is important to drink the entire amount and specific type of bowel prep recommended for you. Your bowel prep will be based on your medical needs (including your medical history and daily medicines). Having a properly prepared (clean) bowel is the most important thing you can do for your colonoscopy to be a success. If not clean enough, your test may need to be cancelled and the bowel prep redone.
- It is a myth you can 'just take a pill' for bowel prep. All bowel preps include some form of oral drink (often in a large volume).

Why do I need to drink half of my bowel prep the night before and the other half in the morning? Won't that mean I have to wake up very early?

- One of the ways researchers have improved bowel preparation is through the use of 'split dose' bowel prep. 'Split dose' means instead of drinking a large volume of laxative bowel prep solution the night before your colonoscopy, you now **split the dose into two halves**. One dose (half) is taken the night before your colonoscopy, and the other dose (half) is taken about 5 hours before your test. This split dose approach has been proven to result in better bowel cleansing.
- Depending on your appointment time, you may need to wake up very early to drink the second half of your bowel prep. This can be very tiring, but it helps to ensure your bowel is clean enough for your colonoscopy to be a success. If not clean enough, your test may need to be cancelled and the bowel prep redone.
- **Split-dose example:** If your colonoscopy appointment is at 9 a.m., you will likely be instructed to start drinking your bowel prep (first half) at 8 p.m. the night before your test. You will also be asked to start drinking the other half at 4 a.m. (5 hours before your appointment) the morning of your test.

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- Speak with your colonoscopy clinic to confirm what times you need to start and finish your bowel prep.

Can I do the bowel prep if I have a medical condition such as diabetes?

- Yes. Your doctor may need to adjust or stop certain medicines before the test. Be sure to tell your colonoscopy team about any conditions you have or medication you are taking.
- [Learn more](#) about diabetes and how to prepare for a colonoscopy.

How long does it take a bowel prep to kick in?

- It depends on the formula you're taking. A PEG-based bowel prep (such as Colyte™ or PegLyte™) may take 1 to 3 hours.

Will I be up all night with my colonoscopy bowel prep?

- You may not have as restful of a night as usual.
- While everyone's body is different, most people are able to finish the first round of flushing out their bowel before going to sleep. You may still have to get up in the night to use the bathroom though.
- Depending on your appointment time, you may have to wake up early to take your second dose the morning of your colonoscopy.

What if I'm still pooping before my colonoscopy?

- As long as your poop is clear (or yellow or see-through, but not cloudy) your colonoscopy prep is done. If it's not clear, you may have to take additional steps before you can have your colonoscopy. In most cases, if you started your prep on time, you won't be pooping a lot by the time you arrive for your procedure. If you're worried about having an accident, go ahead and invest in some underwear protection to ease your mind.

I've had a colonoscopy before, and I was told my bowel wasn't clean enough. How can I make sure it is clean this time?

- There could be many reasons why your bowel may not have been clean enough. It's important to discuss this with your colonoscopy team. Let them know what steps you followed in the past and what bowel prep was used. Adjustments can be made to your bowel prep plan.
- When you receive your bowel prep instructions, review them with your colonoscopy team. Make sure you understand when and how much bowel prep to drink, and how to check your stool to see if the bowel prep is working properly.
- Bowel prep is a 5-day process.

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What foods are OK to eat 4 days before my colonoscopy? And which should I avoid?

4 days
before your test

Please start eating only **low-fibre foods** and keep eating them until one day before your colonoscopy.

Low-fibre foods that are OK to eat:

- Well-cooked vegetables without seeds, skins, or peels.
- White bread, white pasta, white rice.
- Canned fruit such as peaches or pears (without seeds, skins, or peels).
- Dairy products like plain yogurt or cheese.
- Eggs.
- Chicken, beef, pork, fish, tofu, or smooth nut butters.



Do not eat:

- Nuts and seeds.
- Corn, popcorn.
- Oatmeal.
- Raw or dried fruit.
- Raw vegetables, including tomatoes.
- Beans, lentils, and quinoa.
- Whole wheat or high-fibre bread.
- Whole wheat or whole grain pasta, cereal, or porridge.

Can I have condiments, sauces, oils, or fats on my low-fibre days?

- Yes, you can have:
 - ✓ Smooth sauces (without seeds, nuts, or dried fruit) like BBQ sauces, hot sauces, soya sauce, gravies, and mayonnaise.
 - ✓ Smooth condiments like ketchup and yellow mustard (not grainy mustard)
 - ✓ Vinegars
 - ✓ Sugar, clear jelly (without seeds, pulp, or skins), honey, lemon juice and syrup.
 - ✓ Butter, margarine, and cooking oils.
- **Do NOT have:**
 - × Chunky peanut butter, preserves, or jams, marmalade, shredded coconut, pickles, olives, relishes, sauerkraut, grainy mustard, horseradish.

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Can I have herbs and spices on my low-fibre days?

- Yes, you can have:
 - ✓ Salt and finely ground pepper (no ground peppercorns).
 - ✓ Finely ground or flaked dried herbs and spices (not whole seed spices).

What kinds of drinks can I have on my low-fibre days?

- You can have:
 - ✓ Coffee, tea, or hot chocolate.
 - ✓ Soft drinks, sodas, or sports drinks.
 - ✓ Milk - plain or flavoured.
 - ✓ Dairy-free products, like almond milk, coconut milk and soy milk.
 - ✓ Fruit or vegetable juice **without pulp**.
 - ✓ Meal replacements like Boost™ or Ensure™ (without added fibre).

Can I still chop or blend my food to make a smoothie during my low fibre diet?

- Yes, chopping or blending foods does not change the amount of fibre content.
- **Reminder:** If you're taking fibre supplements (such as Metamucil™ or Benefibre™), STOP taking them 5 days before your test

Video 4: [Colorectal cancer screening](#)

How do you screen for colorectal cancer?

- You may have been referred for a colonoscopy if you had an abnormal Fecal Immunochemical Test (or FIT) result.
- There are two types of screening tests for colorectal cancer – FIT and colonoscopy. Screening looks for early signs of cancer in people who feel well and have no symptoms.
- [Learn more](#) detailed information about colorectal cancer screening in Video 4.

If my FIT is abnormal, does this mean I have colorectal cancer?

- If your FIT result is abnormal, it means that blood was found in your stool sample. This can happen for different reasons. While most people with an abnormal result do not have cancer, your healthcare provider may recommend a colonoscopy to find the cause of the bleeding.
- If 100 people have an abnormal FIT, about 2 to 3 will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer. When colorectal cancer is found early, 90% of cases can be treated successfully. This is why screening can save your life.

Where can I find more information about FIT & colorectal cancer screening?

- [Learn more](#) about Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT).
- [Learn more](#) about colorectal screening.

How can I share information about FIT & colorectal cancer screening with a family member or friend?

- If you're 50 to 74 years old, it's a good idea to consider regular colorectal cancer screening.

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- Starting a conversation about screening can help save lives. Here are some tips for talking to someone you know about colorectal cancer screening:
- Be encouraging. Remind them that you care and want them to be around for a long time.
- Focus on the lifesaving benefits of screening.
- Break down barriers. Let them know FIT is free and can be done in the privacy of their own home. Some people avoid the doctor's office. You can make it a little easier by sharing information on how they can [order a free FIT kit online](#).
- Give them time.
- Let them think about it and decide for themselves if screening is right for them.

For health advice and information, call Health Link 24/7 by dialing 811.
If you need an interpreter, just say the language you need.