



Colonoscopy Fact Sheet

Colonoscopy

What is a colonoscopy?

A **colonoscopy** lets your child's doctor look inside the entire large intestine. The procedure lets the doctor see things such as inflamed tissue, abnormal growths, and ulcers. It is also used to look for causes of unexplained changes in bowel habits and to understand why your child may be experiencing symptoms like abdominal pain, rectal bleeding, and weight loss.

What is the colon?

The **colon**, or large bowel, is the last portion of the digestive tract, or gastrointestinal tract. The colon is a hollow tube that starts at the end of the small intestine and ends at the rectum and anus. The colon is about 5 feet long in an adult, and its main function is to store unabsorbed food waste and absorb water and other body fluids before the waste is eliminated as stool.

Preparation

You will be given instructions in advance that will explain what you and your child need to do to prepare for your colonoscopy.

Your child's colon must be completely empty for the colonoscopy to be thorough and safe. To prepare for the procedure your child will have to follow a liquid diet for 1 to 3 days before he or she has the procedure.

The liquid diet should be clear and not contain food colorings. Things like

- fat-free bouillon or broth
- water
- plain tea
- diet soda
- gelatin

Thorough cleansing of the bowel is needed before a colonoscopy. Your child will most likely be asked to take a laxative the night before the procedure.

Be sure to inform the doctor of any medical conditions your child has and medications your child takes on a regular basis such as

- aspirin
- arthritis medications
- blood thinners
- diabetes medication
- vitamins that contain iron

The medical staff will also want to know if your child has any medical condition that may need special attention.

Procedure

For the colonoscopy, your child will lie on the left side on the examining table. Your child will be given pain medication and a moderate sedative to keep them comfortable and help them relax during the exam. The doctor and a nurse will monitor your child's vital signs (heart rate, blood pressure), look for any signs of discomfort, and make adjustments as needed.

The doctor will then insert a long, flexible, lighted tube into the rectum and slowly guide it into your child's colon. The tube is called a colonoscope. The scope sends a picture of the inside of the colon onto a video screen so the doctor can carefully examine the lining of the colon. The scope bends so the doctor can move it around the curves of the colon.

Your child may be asked to change positions at times so the doctor can more easily move the scope to better see the different parts of the colon. The scope blows air into the colon and inflates it, which helps give the doctor a better view. Most children do not remember the procedure afterwards.

The doctor can remove tissue samples to test in the lab for diseases of the colon (biopsy). In addition, if any bleeding starts in the colon, the doctor can pass a laser, heated probe, electrical probe, or special medicines through the scope to stop the bleeding. The tissue removal and treatments to stop bleeding usually do not cause pain. In many cases, a colonoscopy helps to give the best diagnosis and treatment of colon abnormalities without having your child go through a major operation.

During the procedure your child may feel mild cramping. Your child can reduce the cramping by taking several slow, deep breaths. When the doctor has finished, the colonoscope is slowly withdrawn while the lining of your child's bowel is carefully examined. Bleeding and puncture of the colon are possible but do not happen often during a colonoscopy.

A colonoscopy usually takes about 30 to 60 minutes. The sedative and pain medicine should keep your child from feeling much discomfort during the exam. Your child may feel some cramping or the sensation of having gas after the procedure is completed, but it usually stops within an hour. Your child will need to remain at the colonoscopy facility for 1 to 2 hours so the sedative can wear off.

Rarely, some children experience

- severe abdominal pain
- fever, bloody bowel movements
- dizziness
- weakness

afterward. If your child has any of these side effects, **contact your physician immediately**. Medications such as blood-thinners may need to be stopped for a short time after having your child's colonoscopy, especially if a biopsy was performed or polyps were removed. Full recovery by the next day is normal and expected and your child may return to their regular activities.

Your physician may give you other special instructions to follow.