



COLONOSCOPY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a Colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is the examination of the large bowel (colon) with a flexible instrument (a colonoscope). The doctor inserts the instrument through the back passage whilst the patient is under sedation. The scope has a video-chip camera at its tip to enable the colon to be examined. Instruments can be put down through the colonoscope to take samples of tissue (biopsies) to examine under the microscope. Polyps, or growths in the bowel which may, or may not, be benign can also be removed via the colonoscope. The procedure takes 20 – 30 minutes to perform.

For a successful colonoscopy, the bowel must be well prepared. **From the day prior** you will be asked to drink **clear fluids** only (clear soups, jellies, cordial etc) . Then follow the directions included in the preparation kit you will be given, or as directed on the prescription **if you** are purchasing the kit yourself.

What to bring:

You will be in hospital for 3-4 hours, and so should bring reading material if you wish to pass the time. Please bring a list of medications that you are on, as well as any relevant x-rays.

Why have a Colonoscopy?

Colonoscopies are most commonly performed for bowel symptoms such as diarrhoea, or pain or because of bleeding from the bowel. In some individuals with a family history, colonoscopy may also be an appropriate test to screen for bowel cancer.

What are the alternatives?

A barium enema involves an X-ray of the large bowel, and is an alternative method of examining the bowel. It does have fewer risks, but biopsies are unable to be taken, nor can polyps removed. It also does not examine the rectum or lowest part of the bowel very accurately. Virtual colonoscopy involves a CT scan of the abdomen with special software enabling a three dimensional image of the colon. This is not used as a routine and again does not enable biopsies to be taken or polyps removed.

What are the Risks of Colonoscopy?

1. Incomplete colonoscopy

On some occasions, the colonoscope is unable to be passed through the entire colon. This occurs in between 5% and 20% of cases depending upon your age and whether you have had previous pelvic or abdominal surgery. If this does occur, and it is felt important to examine the rest of the colon, then either you will have the rest of the colon examined by a virtual colonoscopy or a barium enema on the same or on a subsequent day. Generally, however, if at all possible by the end of the day of the procedure the colon should have been adequately examined.

2. Missed lesions

No medical test can be 100% accurate. Colonoscopies can miss lesions in the bowel in between 2 and 8% cases. For serious lesions such as cancer, the chance is much less, but still present. For these reasons, it is recommended that all patients over the age of 50, and those with a family history of colorectal cancer perform a “faecal occult blood” test every year. Once you have had a colonoscopy, if you fall into one of these categories you should have your first of these tests performed one year after the colonoscopy. These test kits are available from your chemist or local doctor

3. Perforation of the colon

A perforation is when a hole or tear is made in the colon by the colonoscope. This is rare, occurring in 1 in 1000 cases. If it occurs, then it would be likely that an operation would be required to repair the damaged area. This would involve a stay in hospital for approximately 1 week.

4. Bleeding from the bowel

Small amounts of blood are not uncommon after biopsies and polypectomies (removal of polyps). In 1 in 100 cases of polypectomy the bleeding may be sufficient enough to require transfusion.

What Can I Expect after the Colonoscopy?

Following the procedure you will be taken to the procedure room. Upon recovering from the sedation, you will be given light refreshments before discharge. Your Doctor will speak with you after the procedure, and give you a provisional written report. **Driving is not** recommended for the remainder of the day, and a responsible adult should be with you in the **first 24 hours** after the procedure.

You may experience some windy discomfort, which should be short lived. If it is persistent, or you are concerned or have questions, please feel free to ring your Doctor via the rooms on **8276 9888** (Flinders) or **8359 2411** (Wakefield)