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Colonoscopy Information

Preparing for your colonoscopy

Colonoscopy is a procedure that enables your doctor to examine the inside of the large bowel (or colon). It is performed at a hospital. A soft bendable tube about the thickness of the index finger is gently inserted into the anus (bottom) and advanced around the rectum and colon. It can be performed for many reasons. For example, as part of a routine screen for cancer, in patients with known polyps, or patients who have had polyps removed previously, or to evaluate symptoms such as diarrhoea or bleeding.

What preparation is required?

The rectum and colon must be completely emptied of stools for the procedure to be performed. In general, preparation consists of a large volume (2-3 litres) of a special cleansing solution. Your doctor will give you instructions regarding the cleansing routine to be used.

Please follow the instructions very carefully. The bowel needs to be completely empty to allow for a complete examination. The success of your examination depends on the bowel being as clear as possible; otherwise the examination may need to be repeated.

Sedation/anaesthetic

Prior to colonoscopy, you will meet the anaesthetist, who is responsible for your sedation during colonoscopy. Before the procedure either a sedative injection or light anaesthetic is given into the vein to make you comfortable.

What can be expected during the colonoscopy?

The procedure is usually well tolerated and rarely causes pain. There is often a feeling of pressure, gassiness, bloating or cramping at various times during the procedure. You will be given medication through a vein during the colonoscopy to help you relax and better tolerate any discomfort that you may experience. You will be lying on your side, or your back while the colonoscope is advanced around the large intestine. The lining of the colon is examined carefully while the instrument is withdrawn. The procedure usually lasts for 15 to 60 minutes. In rare instances the entire colon cannot be visualised and your doctor could request another procedure or investigation.

What if colonoscopy shows an abnormality?

If your doctor sees an area that needs a more detailed evaluation, a biopsy may be obtained and submitted to a laboratory for analysis. This is done by placing a special instrument through the colonoscope to sample the lining of the colon. Polyps are generally removed. The majority of polyps are benign (non-cancerous), but your doctor cannot always tell that by the outer appearance alone. They can be removed by a wire loop (snare), occasionally using heat to help with the process. It may take your doctor more than one colonoscopy to do this if there are numerous polyps, or they are very large. Removal of polyps is a very effective means of reducing the risk of bowel cancer in the future.

What complications can occur with colonoscopy?

Firstly, it is important to be aware that there are risks associated with not having the procedure, eg missed diagnosis, including cancer.

Minor side effects include:-

- (1) Intolerance of bowel preparation (dizziness, vomiting, headaches)
- (2) Minor discomfort, or soreness around the anus.
- (3) Temporary drowsiness after the procedure, which is due to the sedation given.

Serious complications are rare at less than one in a thousand examinations and include:-

- (1) Perforation (making hole in the bowel). Surgery may be required to repair the perforation.
- (2) Major bleeding from the bowel (as a result of polyps being removed). Very rarely blood transfusion or surgery is required for this complication.
- (3) Injury to the spleen, which may require surgery.

Polyps or cancer can be missed. The risks are higher if your bowel is not cleaned properly. It is important that you follow the instructions to clear your bowel before the procedure.

Complications of sedation are uncommon and are usually avoided by administering oxygen during the procedure and monitoring oxygen levels in the blood. Rarely however, in patients with severe cardiac or respiratory disorders serious sedation reactions can occur. Pneumonia (caused by vomit going down the lungs), is a rare complication of sedation.

A number of rare side effects can occur with any endoscopic procedure. Death is a remote possibility with any interventional procedure. If you wish to have full details of rare complications please arrange a consultation with Dr Simon Louis prior to the colonoscopy.

Please be aware that the serious complications of colonoscopy are very uncommon. Colonoscopy is in general a safe and well tolerated procedure, and is currently our most accurate investigation to investigate the bowel/colon.

Special Considerations

If you have diabetes, heart valve disease, a pacemaker or are taking blood thinning tablets such as Warfarin or Plavix/Clopidogrel, it is important to discuss this with your local doctor or Dr Simon Louis **before** the colonoscopy is organised as special arrangements may be necessary. Aspirin and most medications can be continued as usual prior to colonoscopy.

After the procedure

You will remain in the recovery room for about 1 hour until the effect of the medication wears off.

For about one hour after you awake you may feel bloated due to the air that is inserted during the procedure. Very rarely you may pass a small amount of blood due to biopsies that have been taken and this is of no concern.

You will be given a discharge sheet with details of new medications, follow up appointments and details of the colonoscopy findings. The doctor or a nurse will explain your results to you after colonoscopy, or at a follow up visit.

If polyps were found during your procedure, you may need to have future surveillance colonoscopies to make sure no further polyps are found. Your doctor will advise you on the frequency of your colonoscopy examinations.

The sedation given for the colonoscopy will take several hours to fully wear off. You will need to have a friend or relative take you home from the procedure. You must not drive a car, operate any machinery, make any important decision, sign any legal documents, until the day after your colonoscopy.

PLEASE PHONE THE SECRETARY 2 DAYS PRIOR TO CONFIRM YOUR BOOKING ON (07) 5571 5444. IF UNATTENDED, PLEASE LEAVE MESSAGE ON ANSWERING SERVICE.

If you are in a health fund, please ensure that you contact them and find out if you have an excess/co-payment. This will need to be paid to hospital staff on admission. If you are uninsured, payment for Dr Louis and anaesthetist will need to be finalised 2 days prior to procedure, and payment to hospital on the day of procedure.

Please ensure you have made arrangements for someone to take you home, and stay with you overnight.