

COLONOSCOPY

WHAT IS A COLONOSCOPY?

A colonoscopy is a medical exam which allows a doctor to look directly inside your large intestine (colon) so as to identify the possible causes of intestinal complaints.

Where necessary, a colonoscopy also enables tissue samples to be taken in a simple and painless manner, for subsequent laboratory testing.

A colonoscope is a flexible tube (with a small camera at one end) that is inserted through the anus and guided into the colon.

IS IT PAINFUL?

In general, the procedure is not painful, though it may cause some discomfort. The anatomical shape of your bowel or the presence of scar tissue due to previous surgery may cause some pain during the colonoscopy.

If needed you will be given a sedative so as to reduce discomfort during the exam.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE EXAM

Special preparation is needed in the days prior to the exam,

as the colon must be thoroughly cleansed for the colonoscopy to be properly performed. For this reason, it is fundamental that you strictly follow the instructions given to you by your doctor.

Please inform your doctor in advance of any medical conditions you have and any medications you take regularly. You must not take medication containing iron or carbon for at least two days before the exam.

THE PROCEDURE

The examination generally takes place in conscious sedation (administration of opiates and benzodiazepines)

After removing your shoes, lower clothing and underwear, you will be asked to lie on the examining table on your left side.

The doctor will then insert the colonoscope into your anus and slowly guide it into your colon.

The successful outcome of the exam will depend on the thorough cleansing of your bowel, the anatomical configuration of your colon, and also on your co-operation.

During the exam, the colonoscope will blow air into your colon to inflate it; the procedure may cause some discomfort, such as the sensation of bloatedness or slight pain.

Where necessary, the colonoscopy may be used to provide therapy; for example, the doctor may remove polyps or dilate strictures in the colon.

A colonoscopy usually takes about 45 minutes (a little longer if treatments are performed).

Complications from a colonoscopy performed for purely diagnostic purposes are very rare (in 4 patients out of every 1000).

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE EXAM

After the exam, you will be left to rest for 30 minutes, and then you can return home.

You may feel some abdominal bloatedness after the exam, which will go away after a few hours; applying an ice pack to the area will help relieve the discomfort.

If after the exam abdominal pain persists, or you have darkened or bloody faeces, contact the centre where the colonoscopy was performed immediately.

The medication used to reduce discomfort during the exam will make you feel light-headed and will slow down your reflexes, so it is important that you are accompanied by a person you trust who can take you home. For this same reason, for the rest of the day, you should avoid making important decisions and operating machinery that requires high levels of concentration.