

# *Internally Yours*<sup>®</sup>

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## What is Colonoscopy?

**Colonoscopy** employs a flexible instrument to examine the entire colon (large intestine). Colonoscopy is the most accurate method of detecting polyps (growths that may become cancerous), investigating unexplained changes in bowel habits, and diagnosing the cause of blood in the stool. Colonoscopy can detect inflammation, ulcers, diverticulosis, abnormal tissue growths, and sites of bleeding. Colonoscopy also permits the removal of polyps, taking biopsies (tissue samples) of other abnormalities, and often controlling bleeding.

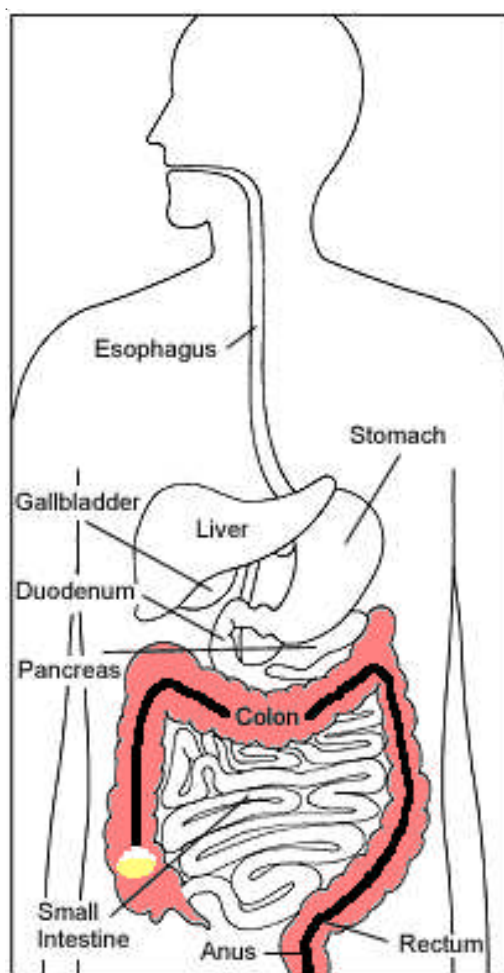
Sedation is given prior to beginning the procedure. A thin tube with a light is inserted into the rectum and then gently advanced through the entire colon. Although colonoscopy can be uncomfortable, with sedation it is generally not painful, and does not require general anesthesia. Additional doses of sedation are given during the procedure as needed.

In order to obtain a good exam and to avoid missing any abnormalities, the colon must be as clean and empty as possible. Preparation for colonoscopy therefore requires a diet of clear liquids for one or two days, and taking a laxative.

Colonoscopy itself generally takes only 20-40 minutes. Allowing for check-in procedures, insertion of an IV line, administration of sedation, and observation after the procedure while the sedative wears off, expect to spend 2-3 hours at the endoscopy center. Because of the sedation employed, an adult must be available to drive home.

Colonoscopy is considered safe; complications such as bleeding, infection or injury to internal organs are very rare.

It is believed that colon cancer occurs only in individuals who have polyps; in fact, cancer begins in the polyp itself. Colon cancer thus does not develop in the absence of polyps. For this reason, colon cancer can be prevented if polyps are discovered and removed in time. Therefore, all adults – women as well as men – aged 50 and over, are encouraged to undergo colon screening. Colonoscopy is currently the most accurate test available for the detection of polyps, and the only test that permits polyp removal at the time of discovery.



### Typical Indications for Colonoscopy

- rectal bleeding
- unexplained alterations in bowel habit
- abdominal pain
- unexplained iron-deficiency anemia
- family history of colon polyps or colon cancer
- routine screening beginning age 50 for all men and women