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What is a Pill Camera?

Capsule endoscopy, or “**Pill Camera**” is a relatively new test that permits a direct visual examination of the small intestine, an area of the body not previously accessible using upper endoscopy from above or colonoscopy from below.

The actual camera is a vitamin-sized capsule that contains a camera, lens, light source, a battery for power and a radio transmitter. The capsule is easily swallowed, and as it travels through the intestinal tract propelled by the natural motion of the intestines, it takes two pictures every second. These images are continuously transmitted to a data recorder worn on a waist belt. Afterwards, these images — generally numbering 50,000 or more — are studied on a computer monitor.

Capsule endoscopy is useful in the diagnosis of obscure gastrointestinal bleeding, in the study of Crohn's disease, and in the discovery of tumors of the small intestinal tract. It may help diagnose unexplained anemia, diarrhea or abdominal pain.

Preparation for a pill camera study requires fasting for 10-12 hours beforehand to ensure an empty stomach. Following capsule ingestion, after a brief period of observation, patients are permitted to leave the endoscopy center, with instructions to return within seven hours, at which time the data recorder will be removed. During the study, normal activity may be resumed. Light food is generally permitted beginning four hours after the capsule is ingested. The capsule is disposable and will usually pass naturally during a bowel movement within 8-24 hours.

Patients with a history of abdominal surgery, cardiac pacemaker or difficulty in swallowing should notify the doctor in advance. Complications are rare with pill camera studies, and generally occur when there is an obstruction in the intestinal tract. Notify the doctor if in the event of abdominal pain, chest pain, fever or vomiting. Do not undergo an MRI study until the capsule has passed.

Results of the examination will be available after the captured images have been transferred to a computer and studied by your doctor.

