



Colonoscopy

A colonoscopy is an endoscopic procedure that allows screening the large bowel for polyps or colon cancer or surveillance of the large bowel if a patient has a history of colon cancer, colon polyps, or inflammatory bowel disease. It involves examining the large bowel and distal small bowel with a fiber optic camera on a flexible tube, which is passed into the anus. A colonoscopy is both diagnostic and therapeutic because small polyps (precancerous lesions) can be removed at the time of the procedure. Lesions, which are not amenable to endoscopic resection, (i.e. large polyps or cancers) can be biopsied and tattooed at the time of the colonoscopy.

Because most colorectal cancers take five to ten years to develop from a polyp, removing these pre-cancerous lesions can prevent colorectal cancer. All patients 50 years of age or older should have a screening colonoscopy. If a patient has a family history of colorectal, endometrial, ovarian, urinary tract, small bowel, or pancreaticobiliary cancer in a first degree relative (parents or siblings) a colonoscopy should be performed 10 years before the family member was diagnosed. For example, if a patient's mother was diagnosed with colon cancer at the age of 50 the patient should undergo their first colonoscopy at the age of 40. If there is no evidence of polyps or cancer at the time of the initial colonoscopy, the patient does not have to undergo another colonoscopy for ten years. If a polyp is found the patient will need another colonoscopy in one to five years depending on the type of and number of polyps present. If a cancer is found at the time of colonoscopy, the patient will need to undergo surgical intervention.

Before a colonoscopy, patients must perform a laxative preparation, which usually involves drinking a powder mixed in liquid or pills the day prior to the procedure to purge the entire colon. Some patients who have constipation may require a two-day bowel preparation. The day prior to the procedure the patient should limit their diet to clear liquids only and avoid any red or orange colored drinks. It is also helpful to avoid vegetables and nuts three to five days before the procedure to avoid the presence of a large amount of undigested fiber in the colon.

The main risks of the procedure include but are not limited to perforation, bleeding, risk of anesthesia, risk of infection, risk of dehydration, risk of not completing the colonoscopy, and failure to identify small lesions.

Remember the above information does not replace instructions given to you by your healthcare provider. If you, or a family member, need a colonoscopy please call our office today for an appointment.