

# Colonoscopy Patient Information

This leaflet explains more about your colonoscopy and what you can expect when you come to hospital. It also details the instructions on how to prepare for this test, including when to stop eating, how to cleanse your bowel and what tablets you may need to stop.

## What is colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is a camera examination of the bowel. It helps to find the cause of your abdominal symptoms and to diagnose and sometimes treat diseases of the bowel. The procedure takes 30-45 minutes, but please allow 2-3 hours in the hospital for the whole process to be completed.

## What are the risks?

This test is very safe, but very rarely there can be a problem, for example:

- The sedative can affect your breathing making it slow and shallow.
- There is a small risk of missing polyps (small growths) or other abnormalities. It is very rare to miss bowel cancer. Successful laxative preparation decreases this risk.
- When a biopsy is taken or a polyp is removed, on rare occasions there may be bleeding.
- Perforation, which is a tear in the wall of the colon is very rare (< 1:1500 risk). If this happens it would require a short stay in hospital including treatment with antibiotics and possibly surgical repair.

## Are there any alternatives?

For some conditions it may be possible to perform a CT scan. The disadvantage of this procedure is that a biopsy cannot be taken or a polyp removed. The radiation from the scan may make this unsuitable for some patients.

## If my symptoms have stopped before the colonoscopy should I still come for the test?

**Yes.** It is important that you still come for the test. Your doctor has organised this test to ensure you have no problems in your large bowel. Although the symptoms may have gone, it remains important to examine the bowel.

## How can I prepare for colonoscopy?

- A clear view of the colon is required for this examination to be successful and so your bowel must be as empty as possible. It is vitally important to follow the advice given about dietary and laxative preparation. This is detailed below.
- If you are diabetic or taking warfarin, or blood thinning medications such as Apixaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran, Clopidogrel, Ticagrelor or Prasugrel please call us on 020 8725 1913.
- Take other medications as normal, except iron tablets or stool bulking laxatives such as Fybogel or Movicol which should be stopped one week before your examination.
- Please bring a list of your regular medications and bring any inhalers or sprays with you.

## Colonoscopy dietary and laxative preparation

Please follow the instructions below. **Failure to comply with the laxative preparation may lead to cancellation of your procedure for safety reasons.**

### Three days before the examination

Eat a light diet avoiding cereals, wholemeal bread, salads, fruits or any food containing fibre, nuts or seeds. Please remove the skins from all vegetables and tomatoes. Instead please eat low fibre food such as rice, pasta, fish, chicken, peeled potatoes, dairy products, white bread.

### The day before the examination

**DO NOT EAT FOOD FOR 24 HOURS BEFORE YOUR COLONOSCOPY.** Instead take only *clear fluid* e.g. water, herbal tea, black tea or coffee (can have sugar but no milk), lemonade, sports drinks, orange squash. You may have clear soup (broth) or yellow/ green jelly.

### At 4pm on the day before the examination

Drink one sachet of Citrafleet (mix with a glass of water). The drink may fizz. Drink a full glass of water after drinking the Citrafleet. It can start to work within as little as 30 minutes but can take up to 5 hours to work. Please drink plenty of *clear fluid* (3-4 pints) throughout the afternoon and evening as above.

### At 6am on the day of the examination

Drink the second sachet of Citrafleet, even if you think the first one has already worked. Please drink a further 1-2 pints of *clear fluid* up to two hours before the colonoscopy. For afternoon appointments you can take the second sachet later, for example at 9am.

### What if my bowel preparation hasn't worked for hours after taking the laxative?

**Please be patient.** We anticipate that the laxative will work within a few hours as outlined in the manufacturer's guidelines, but this can sometimes take a little longer depending on your age, diet, if you have diabetes and whether you suffer from constipation. If by the morning of your appointment you have had no result, please contact us for advice. Once it does start working please stay close to a toilet as sometimes no warning may be given.

### What If the laxative makes me feel sick or nauseated?

Occasionally, nausea maybe experienced. If this happens stop drinking the preparation for 15 minutes and then start again, slowly at first. If you experience nausea or vomiting go to your local pharmacy and ask for anti-sickness tablets. Contact the endoscopy unit if your symptoms persist.

### Advice for diabetic patients

The bowel preparation can upset your diabetes temporarily. To avoid "hypos" please take sugary drinks as required and monitor your blood sugar every 2-3 hours. Continue your usual medications on the evening before the test. Omit your usual tablets or insulin injection on the day of the test and instead bring it with you to the appointment. Please contact us on 020 8725 1913 for further advice about your diabetes.

### Tips on bowel preparation

Apply barrier cream to your anal area as repeated bowel actions can make you sore. If you feel uncomfortable, stop temporarily, keep moving about and you should feel better. No alcohol should be drunk the day before or on the day of your examination.

## On arrival at the endoscopy unit

- A nurse will check your details, including medications and allergies
- The test will be explained again and you will be asked to sign a consent form.
- You will be asked to change into a gown.
- St George's is a national training centre for endoscopy. Students and qualified trainees may be involved in your care. If you do not want students to be present please inform the doctor or the nurse in charge.

## Asking for your consent

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your care. You will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree to have the treatment and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said 'yes' previously. If you would like more details about our consent process, please ask for a copy of our policy.

## What happens during colonoscopy?

- A sedative injection is given. It makes you relaxed but usually not asleep. It can in some patients affect memory of the procedure. Some patients choose not to have the sedation as the test is easily tolerated in many patients.
- The colonoscope is passed into the bowel and air is introduced. You may feel discomfort as if you want to go to the toilet and short lasting cramps can occur.
- A biopsy may be taken or a polyp may be removed during the examination. You cannot usually feel this but you can often visualise what is happening.

## Will I feel any pain?

You may feel some discomfort from the air that is pumped into the large bowel so that the endoscopist can view the lining adequately. Some patients find the air used to inflate slightly uncomfortable. It should not hurt. A mild sedative and painkiller is usually given for the procedure but some people prefer not to have any. Entonox is also available: This is a "gas and air" mixture that can be used during the colonoscopy. It gives a short lasting pain relief and patients can go home unaccompanied 30 minutes later. It is not suitable for patients with certain lung conditions or who have had certain eye/ear procedures.

## What happens after colonoscopy?

Following the tests you will be taken to the recovery area where you will be monitored for 45 minutes. After this you will be able to get dressed and have some refreshments.

If you have had sedation you will not be allowed to drive and must arrange for someone to accompany you home. The medication given during the test will prohibit you from driving for 24 hours after the examination. Please do not plan to take public transport home unless accompanied. If you are unable to arrange transportation we can arrange a taxi to take you home however you are responsible for the fare. You will need a responsible adult at home for at least 12 hours. Once your escort has arrived to accompany you home a nurse will give you a copy of the endoscopy report as well as some important discharge advice. If you have had no sedation or choose to have Entonox only you can leave unaccompanied. A normal diet can be resumed once the procedures are complete.

## Where do I go?

Please attend the Endoscopy Unit, St George's Hospital, First floor, St James' Wing, Blackshaw Road, London, SW17 0QT.

## Is there parking at the hospital?

There is a car park with the entrance located on Blackshaw Road. Please ensure you check the rates before parking.

## Results / Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Upon completion of the colonoscopy the findings will be discussed with you. We will be able to tell you of any visual findings, however any samples will need to be sent to the laboratory for testing. This can take up to three weeks. A copy of the report will be sent to your referring doctor and your GP.

## Useful sources of information

<https://www.nhs.uk/video/Pages/Colonoscopy.aspx>

includes further explanation and videos about colonoscopy.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your colonoscopy, you can call the Endoscopy department on **020 8725 1913 / 1491** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

---

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

