

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

Patient Information

This leaflet explains more about your flexible sigmoidoscopy and what you can expect when you come to hospital. It also details the instructions on how to prepare for this test, including what tablets you may need to stop. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Flexible sigmoidoscopy is a camera examination of the lower bowel. It helps to find the cause of your abdominal symptoms and to diagnose and treat diseases of the intestine. The procedure takes approximately ten minutes, but please allow two to three hours in the hospital for the process to be completed. The procedure is usually done without sedation as it is a brief and well tolerated test but sedation can be given on request.

What are the risks?

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

- There is a small risk of missing polyps (small growths) or other abnormalities. It is very rare to miss cancer.
- When a biopsy is taken or a polyp is removed, there may be bleeding on rare occasions.
- Perforation, which is a tear in the wall of the colon is also very rare (< 1:5000 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 is that in many cases it is not as good at detecting disease and that a biopsy cannot be taken. The radiation involved in a CT scan is also unsuitable for some patients.

If my symptoms have stopped 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 the lower part of your bowel. Although the symptoms may have gone, it remains important to examine this area.

How can I prepare for flexible sigmoidoscopy?

- A clear view of the lower bowel is required for this examination to be successful and so it must be as empty as possible. This is achieved by using an enema. An enema is liquid that is squeezed from a plastic container into the anus that makes you open your bowel soon after you have used it.
- The enema will be provided so that you can administer this at home yourself. It will cause your bowel to open at home before leaving for the appointment. The enema should keep your bowel clear for several hours. You can have the enema in hospital on arrival if you prefer. Please call us on 020 8725 1913 if you wish to discuss this.

- You can eat and drink prior to the test if necessary, although most patients prefer to wait until after the procedure is completed.
- If you are taking 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 which should be stopped one week before your examination.
- Please bring a list of your regular medications and any inhalers or sprays with you.

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 given a gown and, if you are having an enema, this will be given.
- 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 nurse when you are admitted.

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 flexible sigmoidoscopy?

- The flexible sigmoidoscope is gently inserted via anus into the lower bowel. Air is introduced. You may feel discomfort as if you want to go to the toilet and short lasting cramps can occur.
- A biopsy (tissue sample) may be taken or a polyp (small growth on the bowel wall) may be removed during these tests. You cannot usually feel this but you can often visualise what is happening.

Will I feel any pain?

Air is pumped into the large bowel. This is required so that the endoscopist can view the lining adequately. Some patients find this uncomfortable although not usually painful. Sedation, if requested, can be given. It consists of an injection before the procedure that causes relaxation. Entonox (gas and air) is available as an alternative. 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 flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Following the test you will be taken to the recovery area where you will be monitored for up to 45 minutes. After this you will be able to get dressed and have some refreshments. If you have had sedation you must be accompanied home by a responsible adult. If you have had no sedation or Entonox only, you can leave alone.

Where do I go for the test?

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 test 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. If required, a follow up appointment will be requested and this will be sent to you through the post.

Useful sources of information

<https://www.nhs.uk/video/Pages/bowel-cancer-flexible-sigmoidoscopy.aspx>

including further explanation with video about flexible sigmoidoscopy.

Contact us

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

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit 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

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

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



Reference: GAS_FS_01 Published: April 2019 Review date: April 2021