

# Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

**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.**

Flexible sigmoidoscopies are booked at one of our three endoscopy sites: The Endoscopy Unit at St George's Hospital, the Day Case Unit at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton or the Nelson Health Centre. Please refer to your appointment letter / appointment text for the location of your procedure.

## What is a 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 10 minutes, but please allow up 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 or Entonox (gas and air) can be given on request. If sedation is requested, please note that you will need to fast for six hours prior to your appointment and ensure you read the section below under "What happens after flexible sigmoidoscopy?"

## 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 do I prepare for my flexible sigmoidoscopy?**

- In order to complete the procedure, your bowel needs to be empty. You will need to use an enema before your appointment. The enema makes you go to the toilet to empty your lower bowel. You need to use it no later than one hour before you leave the house for your appointment. Please read the instructions on how to give the enema below.
- If you have not been provided with an enema, you can collect it from the endoscopy unit or purchase it from your local pharmacy. Please ask the pharmacist for a Phosphate enema for a flexible sigmoidoscopy. **Please note** that your pharmacist may need to order it in for you, so leave adequate time for this.
- Do not eat for 30 minutes before you use the enema and again until you've had your procedure. You can drink water but no other liquids. **Please note:** If you opt to have sedation you must not eat

for six hours prior to your appointment and must stop drinking water two hours before.

- The effect of the enema wears off within an hour, so you don't need to worry about travelling to the hospital.
- If you aren't sure about whether you should use the enema, or need to speak to someone about how to use it, please contact us on the phone numbers on page 5 of this leaflet under **Contact us**.
- If you are taking blood thinning medications such as Warfarin, Apixaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran, Clopidogrel, Ticagrelor or Prasugrel, please contact us on the phone numbers on page 5 of this leaflet under **Contact us**.
- 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.
- If you object to receiving blood products, we need to know in advance so please contact us on the numbers on page 5 of this leaflet under Contact us.

### **Enema instructions**

- 1. Have a plastic bag ready to dispose of the enema after use. Take the enema out of the box and remove the orange protective shield by pulling the shield gently while holding the bottle upright and grasping the grooved cap with your fingers.**
- 2. You can use a little Vaseline or cooking oil to lubricate the tip if you wish.**
- 3. Lie down close to the toilet, for example in a nearby bedroom. Lie on your left side if possible. You may like to lie on a towel. Draw your knees up towards your chest. See Figure 1.**

Fig. 1



- 4. Gently insert the enema tip into your bottom (anus) with the tip pointing towards your navel. Insert as much of the tube as you can comfortably.**
- 5. Use gentle pressure to squeeze the liquid into your bottom. Stop squeezing if you feel any resistance. You might not empty the whole container.**
- 6. Remove the enema from your bottom. Put the used enema in the plastic bag for disposal.**
- 7. Stay lying down, and try to hold the liquid inside you for as long as you can before going to the toilet (around 10 minutes if possible).**
- 8. If you do not get the desired effect, please still attend the hospital for your appointment.**

### **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.
- If a home enema has not been possible, an enema will be given with the assistance of a nurse.

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 your 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 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 as well as some mild cramping. This is 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?**

Most patients can go home immediately after the examination, however if you have had Entonox or sedation you will be taken to the recovery area where you will be monitored for 30 to 45 minutes. After this you will be able to get dressed and have some

refreshments.

**Please note:** 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. A nurse will give you a copy of the endoscopy report as well as some important discharge advice.

### **Where do I go for the test?**

Please see your appointment letter for the location of your appointment and the hospital address below:

**St George's Hospital**, Blackshaw Road, London, SW17 0QT.  
Please go to the Endoscopy Unit, first floor, St James' Wing.

**Queen Mary's Hospital**, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PN.  
Please present at the main reception and you will be directed to the Day Case Unit.

**Nelson Health Centre**, Kingston Road, London SW20 8DA.  
Please present at main reception and you will be directed to the Endoscopy unit.

### **Is there parking at the hospital?**

At St George's Hospital the car park entrance is located on Blackshaw Road.

Queen Mary's Hospital and the Nelson Health Centre each have a car park on site.

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 examination please contact us:

### **For appointments at St George's Hospital or the Nelson Health Centre call:**

The Endoscopy Unit on 020 8725 1913 / 1491 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

### **For appointments at Queen Mary's Hospital call:**

The Day Case Unit on 020 8487 6466 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)

## Preparation checklist

- This test is usually well tolerated without sedation, however if you are planning to have sedation arrange for a friend or relative (18 years of age or older) to escort you home after your appointment and be with you for at least 12 hours.
- Make a note of the date of your appointment.
- If you are taking medications to prevent blood clots please contact us for advice.
- Stop eating 30 minutes before you have your enema at home until after your procedure. You can continue drinking water. If you have sedation, you will need to stop eating six hours before your appointment.
- Self-administer your enema no later than one hour before leaving home for your appointment.

## 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 wings (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

## AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



**Reference:** GAS\_FS\_03\_LP **Published:** October 2021 **Review date:** October 2023