Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

This leaflet explains more about your flexible sigmoidoscopy and how to prepare for this procedure, including how to cleanse your bowel and what medications you may need to stop. It also covers what you can expect when you come to hospital.

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 / test for the location of your procedure.

Important information about your procedure

- St George's is a University Hospital and a National Training Centre for endoscopy, providing specialist training for qualified doctors and nurses developing skills in endoscopy. As part of this training, supervised specialist trainees may be involved in your care. If you would prefer trainees not to be present, please inform the doctor or nurse when you are admitted.
- You will need to **self-administer an enema,** at least an **hour before** leaving home for your appointment. The enema makes you go to the toilet to empty your lower bowel. Please read the instructions on how to give the enema on page 3.
- **STOP EATING 30 MINUTES before you have your enema** unless you plan to have sedation. Clear fluids are allowed (**no milk**) until your appointment.
- The procedure is usually well tolerated without sedation but if you are planning to have sedation, arrange for a friend or relative (18+) to escort you home after your appointment and to be with you for at least 12 hours. We kindly ask escorts not to wait in the Endoscopy Unit due to limited space and we will call when it is completed.
- **If you plan to have sedation, STOP EATING SIX HOURS** before your appointment and drink clear fluids only (**no milk**). **STOP DRINKING CLEAR FLUIDS TWO HOURS** before your appointment.
- Please read and bring your signed Consent Form with you to your appointment.
- We recommend you bring a book or magazine with you to read whilst you are waiting as the mobile phone signal is weak.

Important information about medication

- If you are taking medications for **diabetes** or to **prevent blood clots** such as Warfarin, Apixaban, Edoxaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran, Clopidogrel, Ticagrelor or Prasugrel, please follow the instructions provided by the nurse. If you have not been contacted, please **contact us** on the numbers on page 5.
- Seven days before the procedure, stop taking iron tablets.
- If you take **GLP-1 and/or GLP-3 and/or GIP blocker medication** such as Mounjaro, Wegovy, Ozempic, **please inform us.**
- Please bring a list of your regular medications and bring any inhalers or sprays with you.
- If you are diabetic, please bring your medication and a snack to eat after the 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 sometimes treat diseases of the bowel. The procedure takes between 5 to 15 minutes. Please allow up to four hours in the hospital.

During the procedure, you may feel discomfort as if you want to go to the toilet and intermittent cramping. Sometimes small tissue samples (a biopsy) are taken, or polyps are removed, this is painless. It is usually done without sedation as it is a brief and well tolerated by many but sedation or Entonox (also known as 'gas and air' or 'laughing gas') 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 will need to have an escort home and a responsible adult with you for at least 12 hours following your procedure. If you have Entonox, you will be able to go home unaccompanied 30 minutes after the procedure. Please note that Entonox is not suitable for all patients including those taking Methotrexate or with certain lung conditions or who have had certain eye / ear procedures. For more information about Entonox, go to:
https://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-public/

For further information about the procedure, risks and alternatives please read the enclosed Consent Form.

Asking for your consent and signing the consent form

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your care. Please take the time to read the Consent Form before your appointment. If you feel happy that you understand what is involved and agree to have the procedure, please sign the Consent Form and bring it with you to the appointment. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions before the procedure. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said 'yes' previously.

How to use the phosphate enema

For this procedure to be successful, you will need to empty the lower part of your large bowel with an enema. The phosphate enema should only be given via your rectum (bottom). You will need to use the enema at least one hour before leaving home on the day of your procedure. The enema will have worked in the first hour, so after this time you should have no problem in getting to the hospital.

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.

Alternatively, if you feel unable to administer the enema at home, this can be performed in the endoscopy unit. Please inform the booking office if this is the case as you will need to arrive earlier for your appointment so it can be administered.

Instructions on how to give the enema

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. **With steady pressure, 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. **Gently squeeze the bottle until nearly all the liquid has been emptied. Stop squeezing if you feel any resistance. It is common for a small amount to remain in the bottle.**
6. **Remove the nozzle from your bottom. It is normal to experience some leakage of the enema liquid.**
7. **Remain lying down and try to hold the liquid inside you for as long as you can before going to the toilet (up to 10 minutes if possible). The urge to evacuate your bowel usually passes within two to five minutes.**
8. **Put the used enema in a plastic bag for disposal and wash your hands.**
9. **If you do not get the desired effect, please still attend the hospital for your appointment as your bowel may have been mostly empty before you used the enema. A second enema can be given in the unit if required.**

Advice for diabetic patients

If you have sedation, the period of starvation can upset your diabetes temporarily. A nurse will contact you with advice on how to manage your diabetes whilst you are fasting. If you have not been contacted, please contact us on the telephone numbers on page 5 of this leaflet under **Contact us**. Alternatively, you may wish to speak to your diabetic nurse for advice.

On arrival at the endoscopy unit

- A nurse will check your details, including health history, medications and allergies.
- You will have the opportunity to ask any final questions with the endoscopist before the procedure. If you have not yet signed the form, the procedure will be explained, and you will be asked to sign a Consent Form.
- You will be asked to change into a gown and privacy shorts.
- If a home enema has not been possible, an enema will be given with the assistance of a nurse.
- If you have sedation, an intravenous cannula will be inserted and secured before the start of the procedure.

What happens after flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Most patients can go home immediately after the procedure, 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. A nurse will give you a copy of the flexible sigmoidoscopy report as well as some important discharge advice. A normal diet can be resumed once the procedure is complete.

If you have had sedation, you will not be allowed to drive and must arrange for someone to accompany you home. The medication given 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, however you are responsible for the fare. You will need a responsible adult at home for at least 12 hours. If you have had no sedation or Entonox, you can leave unaccompanied.

Will I get the results / Will I have a follow-up appointment?

We will give you a copy of the flexible sigmoidoscopy report and discuss the findings with you before you are discharged. We will be able to tell you of any visual findings, however any tissues samples will be sent to the laboratory for testing. This can take up to six weeks. A copy of the report and any histology results will be sent to your referring doctor and your GP. If required, a follow up appointment will be requested and will be sent to you by post, text or by phone.

Is there anything I need to watch out for after the procedure?

Minor side effects: It is normal to notice small amounts of bleeding in your poo, or mild abdominal (tummy) discomfort. These symptoms should usually settle within a few days, as should the consistency of your bowel motions.

When to seek urgent medical attention:
For up to two weeks following your procedure, if you develop any of the symptoms listed below, please seek medical advice **immediately** by EITHER contacting the St George's Endoscopy Unit, Monday to Friday between 8.30am and 6pm on 0208 725 1491/2310, OR outside of working hours by attending your nearest Emergency Department. Please ensure you **take a copy of your endoscopy report with you.** Additional information will be provided about procedural aftercare on the day of your appointment.

IMPORTANT: These telephone lines are for emergencies only and the staff will not be able to assist you with queries about your procedure, results or appointments.

The symptoms to look out for include:

- Fever (>38°C) / Chills / Rigors
- Large amounts of blood or clots in your poo
- Severe, persistent or worsening abdominal pain
- Difficulty breathing / shortness of breath
- Persistent nausea or vomiting
- Fainting / Collapse

When can I get back to my normal routine?

You should be able to return to work and all your usual activities the same day, unless you had sedation, when it will be the following day. Please be advised you cannot drive, sign legal documents or drink alcohol for 24 hours following sedation.

Where do I go?

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

- **St George's Hospital**, Blackshaw Road, London, SW17 0QT. Please go to the Endoscopy Unit, First floor, St James' Wing (scan the QR code at the end of this leaflet for a map).

- **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.

Parking at the hospital

For St George's Hospital there is a car park with the entrance located on Blackshaw Road. Queen Mary's Hospital and the Nelson Hospital each have a car park on site. Please ensure you check the rates before parking.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your procedure, please contact us:

For appointments at St George's Hospital or the Nelson Health Centre please call:
The Endoscopy Unit on 020 8725 1913 Monday to Friday 8.30am to 3pm.

For appointments at Queen Mary's Hospital please call:
The Day Case Unit on 020 8487 6466 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

We are sorry that you may experience a delay when contacting us by telephone. Our team manages more than 300 patient bookings each week and our phone lines can be extremely busy. At peak times, you may wait up to 40 minutes for your call to be answered.

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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:
Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm
Friday between 10am and 2pm.
Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.
The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.
PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

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

Scan here for a map on how to find the Endoscopy Unit at St George's Hospital.

Scan here for a digital copy of this leaflet.

This has been endorsed by the Patient Information Group PInG

Reference: GAS_FS_06 **Published:** October 2026 **Review date:** October 2028