

GI Hub

Colonoscopy

What Is a Colonoscopy?

A **colonoscopy** is a medical procedure that allows your doctor to examine the inside of your large intestine (colon and rectum). A thin, flexible tube with a small camera on the end—called a *colonoscope*—is gently guided through the colon so the doctor can look for any problems such as polyps, inflammation, bleeding, or other abnormalities.

Why Is a Colonoscopy Performed?

1. Colon Cancer Screening

Colonoscopy is the **gold standard** screening test for colorectal cancer. It is the *only* test that both **finds** and **removes** precancerous polyps during the same procedure.

2. Evaluation of Symptoms

Doctors may recommend a colonoscopy if you have:

- Blood in the stool
- Changes in bowel habits
- Unexplained abdominal pain
- Chronic diarrhea or constipation
- Iron-deficiency anemia

3. Follow-up and Surveillance

Patients with a history of:

- Colon polyps
- Colon cancer

-Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's or ulcerative colitis)

may need regular colonoscopies to monitor their colon health.

How the Procedure Is Performed

1. Before the Procedure: Bowel Preparation

To get clear pictures, the colon must be completely clean. You will be given a **prep solution** to drink the day before and instructions on diet. Following prep instructions carefully is essential for an accurate exam.

2. During the Procedure

-You will receive **sedation**, so you stay comfortable and often do not remember the procedure.

-The doctor gently inserts the colonoscope through the rectum and advances it through the colon.

-Air or carbon dioxide may be used to inflate the colon slightly so the camera can see clearly.

-If polyps are found, they can usually be **removed immediately**.

-Small tissue samples (biopsies) may be taken if needed.

The procedure typically takes **20–30 minutes**.

3. After the Procedure

-You will rest until the sedation wears off.

-You must have someone drive you home.

-Mild bloating or gas is common and should improve within a few hours.

Normal activities and diet usually can be resumed the same day unless otherwise instructed.

Why Colonoscopy Is So Important

1. Prevents Colon Cancer

Colonoscopy can remove polyps *before* they turn into cancer. This makes it one of the most effective cancer-prevention tools in modern medicine.

2. Detects Cancer Early

If cancer is found early, treatment is much more successful, often requiring less aggressive therapy.

3. Improves Long-Term Health

Early detection of inflammation, bleeding, or other conditions allows for faster treatment and better outcomes.

Risks of Colonoscopy

Colonoscopy is generally very safe. However, like any medical procedure, there are possible risks:

Common (but usually mild)

- Bloating or gas
- Temporary cramping

Rare Risks

- Bleeding**, especially after polyp removal
- Perforation** (a tear in the colon wall) — very rare
- Adverse reaction to sedation**
- Infection** (extremely uncommon)

Your doctor will discuss these risks with you and answer any questions before the procedure.

Who Should Get a Colonoscopy?

Most adults should begin screening at **age 45**, earlier if you have:

- A family history of colon cancer or colon polyps
- A personal history of polyps
- Symptoms such as bleeding or unexplained bowel changes
- Inflammatory bowel disease

Your doctor will recommend how often you need the exam based on your results and risk factors.