



Bowel preparation

Your questions answered

Information for patients



Before having certain bowel procedures such as a colonoscopy, you need to prepare by cleaning out the bowel. Usually this involves a modified diet for a day or two, as well as laxative products and plenty of fluids on the day before the procedure.

The bowel preparation process is crucial, because the bowel must be completely cleaned out for the doctor to get a clear view.

Frequently asked questions

What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a procedure for looking at the inside of the colon (large bowel) and rectum. It involves a doctor inserting a colonoscope – a thin, flexible tube with a small camera – through the anus and into the colon.

Colonoscopies are done to detect abnormalities in the colon, including early signs of colon cancer.

Sometimes, **polyps** are seen during a colonoscopy. These are small growths attached to the bowel wall, which can occasionally become cancerous. If polyps are found, they are usually removed using a tool on the colonoscope.

If the doctor suspects that there are **early signs of cancer**, they will usually do a biopsy – this involves taking a small sample of tissue, which is later examined under a microscope.

What happens during a colonoscopy?

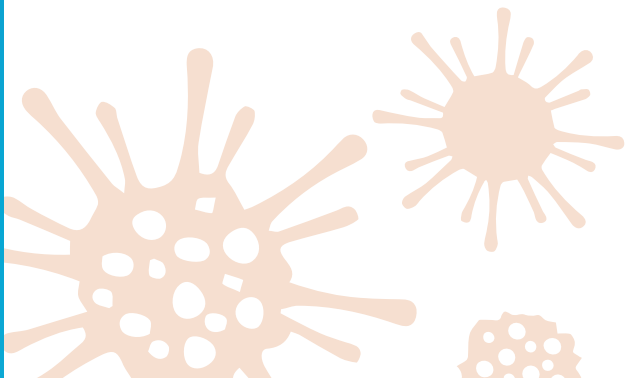
When you arrive at the day surgery or hospital for your colonoscopy, you will have an IV placed in a vein in your hand or arm, so that you can be given medicines and fluids.

Just before the procedure begins, your doctor may give you a mild sedative to help make you as comfortable as possible.

If the bowel preparation has been carried out properly, even the tiniest changes in the intestinal mucosa (lining of the bowel) can be seen.

As you lie on your side or back, your doctor will slowly and gently put the colonoscope into your rectum and up through your colon.

Polyps diagnosed as being benign can be removed surgically. These small, so-called “polyp buds” are removed using biopsy pincers.



Frequently asked questions

What happens after a colonoscopy?

After your test, you will have to rest for a while until the effects of the medicine wear off. While you are resting, your doctor will talk to you about the results of your test and whether any polyps were removed. If a biopsy was performed, you can expect to get the results a few days after the procedure.

Do not plan to drive yourself home after your test. Ask a carer, loved one or friend to go with you on the day of your test.

Before you leave, your doctor will let you know when you can go back to eating a regular diet.

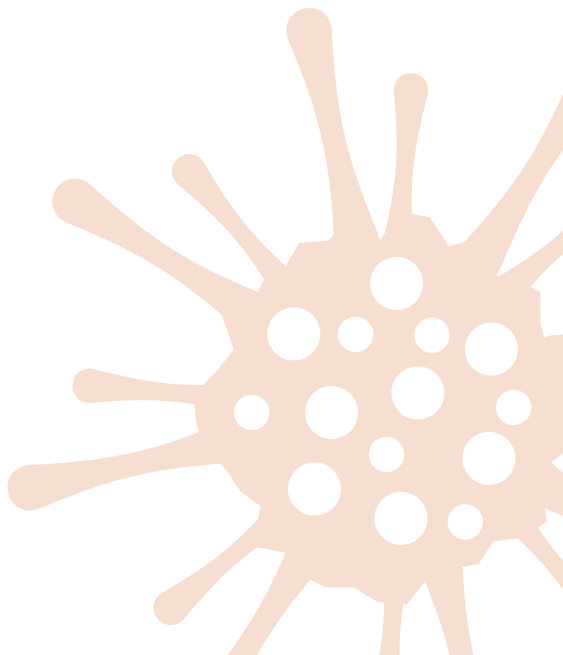
Plan to relax at home for the rest of the day. You might possibly experience bloating, gas or mild cramping after your colonoscopy. This is because the procedure involves filling your colon with air to help your doctor get the best possible view. This discomfort is usually temporary.

What happens if a colonoscopy is done with inadequate bowel preparation?

A good bowel preparation allows the doctor to clearly see the lining of the bowel and thoroughly examine the colon. The procedure is then more likely to be accurate and complete.

If the bowel is not completely clean and empty, the procedure may need to be postponed or repeated. Potential complications may also occur or potential cancer lesions could be missed.

*Source: Information about bowel preparation
Gastroenterological Society of Australia)*



What exactly is bowel preparation?

Your doctor will prescribe a bowel preparation that is best for you. You will receive specific instructions. In general, you can expect to:

1

Modify your diet



Your doctor may recommend a low-residue, low-fibre diet one or two days before the procedure. You may be asked to follow a clear liquid diet including vegetable or beef broth, black tea and coffee, clear fruit juices (the ones you can see through, e.g. apple juice) and soda water.

2

Take a bowel preparation product



As the bowel preparation products (laxatives) do their job, you'll start spending a lot of time on the toilet. These products cause diarrhoea and empty the colon.

3

Increase your fluid intake



Drink additional glasses of water and approved clear liquids to prevent dehydration.

Frequently asked questions

What is a low-fibre diet?

In order for the doctor to see your bowel clearly, it is very important that your bowel is as clean as possible. This can be achieved by eating a low-fibre diet for 2–3 days before you begin to take your bowel preparation, strictly following the instructions for taking the bowel preparation, and drinking plenty of fluids throughout the bowel cleansing period.

Avoid high-fibre foods. Foods which are high in fibre include:

- Wholegrain cereals
- Wholegrain bread/biscuits
- Fruits and vegetables with the skin and stalks left on
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Dried fruits.

Guide for selecting low-fibre options

FOOD GROUP	ALLOWED	NOT ALLOWED
Breads and cereals	<p>Products made with white flour ONLY:</p> <p>Breads, sourdough breads, English muffins, crumpets, wraps, rolls, bagels, croissants, rice and wheat crackers, plain biscuits, cakes, pancakes, pikelets, pretzels.</p> <p>Processed grains: white rice, instant noodles, pasta, processed cereals (rice bubbles, cornflakes).</p>	<p>Products containing wholemeal (brown), multigrain, wholegrain, rye flours, oats, bran seeds, nuts, nut meal, fruit and coconut. Muesli bars, fruit breads, pastries, etc.</p> <p>Whole grain products: brown rice, wild rice, couscous, polenta, quinoa, chia, bran and oats.</p>
Fruit	<p>NO SKINS OR SEEDS</p> <p>Stewed or canned apple, canned pears and peaches, pawpaw, rockmelon, watermelon. Strained fruit juice.</p>	<p>NO SKINS OR SEEDS</p> <p>All other fruits.</p> <p>All dried fruit and nuts.</p>

FOOD GROUP	ALLOWED	NOT ALLOWED
Vegetables	Potato, pumpkin, zucchini, squash, asparagus tips.	NO SKINS OR SEEDS All other vegetables, including salad vegetables.
Dairy	Dairy, soy, almond, powdered or evaporated milk. Plain, vanilla or non-fruit flavoured yoghurt. Cheese. Butter and margarine. Vanilla ice-cream, custard, cream, sour cream, rice pudding and condensed milk.	Dairy foods with added ingredients such as fruit, herbs, peppercorns, nuts, oats. Oat milk.
Meat and protein foods	Plain tender meat, chicken, fish, and eggs.	Hamburger mince, lasagne, bolognaise sauces, savoury mince or any meat dishes which have vegetables or fillers. Legumes: e.g. lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, baked beans or any other legumes. Tofu.
Drinks	Water, tea, herbal teas, and coffee. Soft drinks, cordials and sports drinks. Clear broths and strained soups. Plain milk, Ovaltine and Nesquik/Breaka drinks.	Unstrained fruit juices. Coconut water (many contain added fibre). Milo. NO RED, PURPLE, GREEN OR BLUE COLOURED DRINKS OR JELLY.
Other	Sugar, honey, and Vegemite. Plain ice blocks, plain lollies, plain chocolate.	Pies, quiches, spices, curry, pastry foods, jams, marmalade, peanut butter, dried fruit and nuts, pickles, popcorn, potato chips, seeds, chocolate with fruit, coconut or nuts.

Frequently asked questions

What is a clear liquid diet?

You may be asked to follow a clear liquid diet. The following is a guide to what is allowed as part of a clear liquid diet.

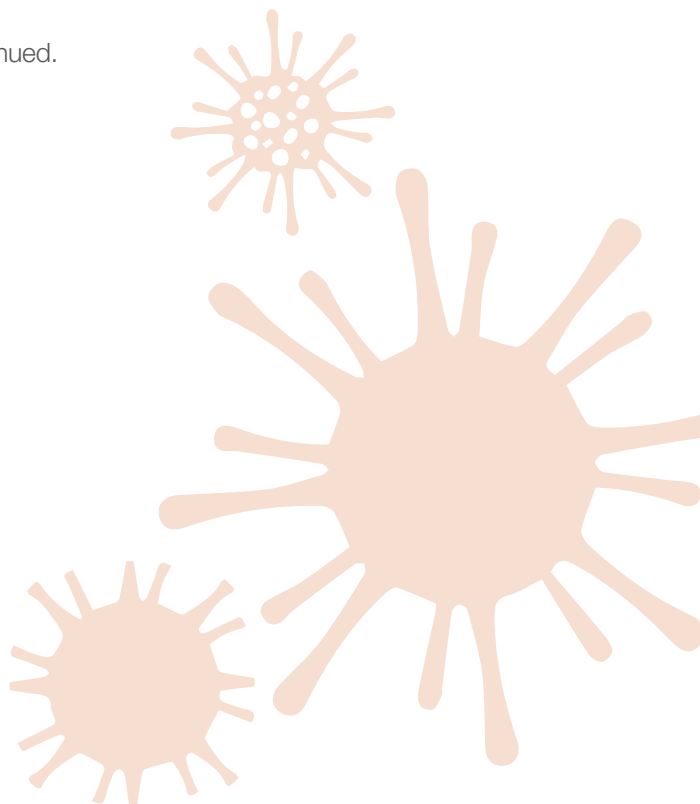
ALLOWED	NOT ALLOWED
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water• Black tea or coffee• Herbal tea (provided not red/purple/blue/green)• Clear broth or Bonox/stock cube in warm water (strained)• Strained apple juice (no pulp/not cloudy)• Soda water• Ginger beer/ale and lemonade• Lemon/orange cordial• Lemonade ice-blocks• Yellow/orange sports drinks• Yellow/lemon electrolyte replacement drinks (e.g. hydrolyte)• Jelly (provided not red/purple/blue/green)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solid food• Cloudy fluids• Milk drinks, including milk in tea/coffee• Fluids that have sediment or floating solids• Brightly coloured liquids (e.g. red/purple/blue/green) as these will stain the bowel• Alcohol of any kind

Do not drink only water. You should also drink a balanced electrolyte solution. Drinking only water to replace the fluid losses may lead to electrolyte imbalance, particularly hyponatraemia (low sodium), and possibly seizures.

Can I continue to take my other medications?

Tell your doctor about all the medications and supplements you are taking, especially aspirin products, arthritis medications, anticoagulants (blood thinners such as warfarin or heparin), clopidogrel, diabetes medications or iron products. Some can interfere with either the bowel preparation or the procedure.

Most medications can be continued.



Tips for a successful bowel preparation

The bowel preparation process may be uncomfortable and time-consuming, but need not be an ordeal. Here are some things you can do to help it go as smoothly and comfortably as possible.



Make sure you get your bowel preparation instructions well before your procedure date, and read them carefully as soon as you get them



Pick up some alcohol-free and fragrance-free wet wipes, and a protective cream or petroleum jelly (Vaseline)



Arrange for the time and privacy you need to complete the prep with as little stress as possible – clear your schedule, and be at home on time to start your prep



Keep a variety of approved clear liquids on hand – but remember not to have any that are coloured red or purple



Try drinking the bowel preparation through a straw – this helps reduce the amount of taste. Sip fluids steadily instead of drinking large amounts quickly. Suck an occasional barley sugar or butterscotch between drinks. Brush your teeth or suck on an ice cube prior to drinking the prep



Wear loose clothing, and stay near the bathroom – and you may wish to set up the bathroom with music, your laptop, magazines, or books

Source: *Preparing for a colonoscopy* – Harvard Health

Useful resources

The following resources provide further information about bowel preparation and bowel cancer screening.

Information about bowel preparation

(Gastroenterological Society of Australia)

<http://membes.gesa.org.au/membes/files/Consumer%20Information/Bowel%20prep.pdf>

Bowel preparation (Bowel Cancer Australia)

Available at: <https://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/tests-investigations/bowel-preparation>



This booklet provides general information about bowel preparation and is intended as a guide only. If you have any questions about your bowel preparation or the procedure you're having, speak to your doctor.



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