

## Colonoscopy Information

### What is a colonoscopy?

- A colonoscopy is a test that uses a colonoscope, or scope, to examine the lining of the rectum and colon. The rectum and colon make up the large intestine, also often called the bowel.
- A scope is a long flexible tube with a camera and a light at the end.

### What to expect during a colonoscopy.

- There are often 1-2 nurses helping you and the doctor in the room.
- Before the test begins, a nurse will insert an intravenous (IV) line to give medicines, including sedation, pain and antibiotic.
- You will be lying comfortably on your left side as the doctor inserts the scope into the anus, gently pushing it through the bowel.
- To help the doctor see inside the bowel, air or carbon dioxide gas will be put through the scope to inflate the colon. You may feel some bloating, pressure and cramps as the scope moves around the various curves of the bowel.
- The doctor will tell you what they are doing as they proceed through the test.
- The test allows the doctor to examine the bowel lining to determine the cause of any bleeding, the presence of any ulcers, inflammation, polyps (small tissue growths) or cancerous growths.
- The doctor can pass instruments through the endoscope to take biopsies, small tissue samples for lab testing, or remove polyps. Most polyps are non-cancerous.
- Once the doctor has finished the test and has taken the samples, they will remove the scope.

### What to expect after a colonoscopy.

- After the test, it is normal to have mild abdominal cramping and passing of gas.
- You will need to stay at the clinic for 30 minutes to 1 hour following the test.

- If you received sedation medication for the test, **you might be considered impaired for up to 24 hours after the test.**
  - You **should not sign any legal documents.**
  - You **will not be able to drive** yourself home. You will need a trusted person to meet you at the endoscopy unit to pick you up from the hospital.
  - You **should not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or anti-anxiety medications.**
  - You **should not be responsible for another person's care**, e.g. a baby, young child, or person in poor health.
- You can begin drinking full fluids and advance to a regular diet as tolerated.
- If you take blood-thinning medication, discuss when to restart these medications with the doctor. Resume all other medications as usual unless told otherwise.

## Are there risks with colonoscopy?

### Common side effects include:

- Reaction to the medication including rash, fever, nausea, vomiting, bloating or breathing problems.
- Redness and soreness at the IV site or rectum.
- Small amounts of blood in the stool for 1 to 2 days if the doctor took a biopsy or removed a polyp.

### Uncommon but serious side effects include:

- Aspiration of stomach contents into the lungs due to the sedation.
- A perforation, or tear, in the colon wall, treated with antibiotics and sometimes surgery to repair the tear.
- Possibility of missing a polyp or small tumour.

## Additional notes:

- Sometimes the **test cannot be completed** if the bowel is not thoroughly emptied or for technical reasons. The doctor and endoscopy unit staff will advise you on the next steps.
- During the first week following the test, **go to the nearest emergency department** if you experience **chills, fever, heavy bleeding or severe abdominal pain**.

**Please note:** The information in this handout is intended only for the person the health care team gave it to. It does not replace the advice or directions given to you by your doctor.

If you have additional questions or need clarification, call the toll free number at 1-855-733-0762 or email [crnavigator@ihis.org](mailto:crnavigator@ihis.org) and the Colorectal Cancer Screening Navigator will be happy to help you.