

General Colonoscopy Instructions

To have a successful colonoscopy, you will have to do your part. This means following all the instructions about what to eat and drink in the days before the procedure. It also means making sure that your colon is empty so your doctor can see clearly when the scope is inside the colon. This involves what is known as ‘bowel preparation.’

Bowel preparation. Colonoscopy prep. Cleaning out your colon. What does this mean?

Your healthcare team will give you plenty of time to prepare. You will get instructions prior to your procedure. It is important to read and follow all of the instructions given to you. If your bowel is not empty, your colonoscopy will not be successful and may have to be repeated. The cleaner your colon, the better chance your provider will have at finding all of your polyps and cancer, which sometimes can be small or hidden.

What can you eat and drink in the days before a colonoscopy?

We recommend to avoid high fiber foods such as nuts, seeds, whole grains, raw fruit and vegetables, beans and corn 3-5 days prior to your procedure .The day before the procedure you will not be able to eat solid food or drink alcohol. You will be able to drink clear liquids, including water, black coffee, tea, ginger ale, apple juice, white grape juice and clear broths. You can have JELL-O® and Popsicles®, but only those that are not red. Drinking extra fluid will help you not become severely dehydrated. You should not drink anything at all for at least four hours before the colonoscopy. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids the day before while you are doing your bowel prep to avoid becoming dehydrated.

What exactly does bowel preparation mean?

There are a few different kinds of bowel preparations, almost all of them liquid. Your doctor will tell you what kind is best for you based on your medical history and their particular preference. They all have the same goal — to get rid of everything in your colon by causing watery diarrhea.

The time of day that you will have to start drinking the solution will depend on when your procedure is scheduled. You will be asked to consume the entire amount of liquid within a specific time period. There is also something called “split-dosing.” In split dosing, you will be asked to drink half of the bowel preparation the night before and then stop. You will get up in the morning and do the other half of the dose in the morning, finishing up at least four hours before the procedure itself. In general, split dosing results in cleaner bowel preparations. If you are having a colonoscopy with intravenous sedation, and you have not been given split dosing instructions, ask your provider if you can do the split dosing.

What can you do to make a colonoscopy preparation easier?

There are things that might help you to drink the solution more easily. These include using a straw to drink the liquid and cooling the solution in the refrigerator before drinking it. You can add lemon drops or chew ginger candy. You will need to stay close to the bathroom during bowel preparation period. A split-dose might make the preparation easier. You will know you have done a good job when your diarrhea looks clear and yellowish, like urine.

You may experience skin irritation around the anus due to the passage of liquid stools. To prevent and treat skin irritation, you should:

Apply Vaseline® or Desitin® ointment to the skin around the anus before drinking the bowel preparation medications. These products can be purchased at any drug store. Wipe the skin after each bowel movement with disposable wet wipes instead of toilet paper. These are found in the toilet paper area of the store.