

You have been advised to have a test called a colonoscopy. Colonoscopy is a procedure used to inspect the large bowel (colon).

### How is the bowel prepared?

In order for your doctor to get the best possible view and make the colonoscopy easier, your large bowel needs to be cleaned out of all waste material.

You will need a preparation kit which contains full instructions. Usually this involves a special diet for a day or two, consisting of no solid food, lots of clear fluids and laxatives the day before the procedure.

You need to have nothing to eat or drink for six hours before the procedure is done. However, you may have a sip of water with your regular medications.

Take your regular medications on the day of the test.

### Special considerations

The following medications should be stopped at least one week before the procedure: iron tablets, aspirin, anti arthritis drugs. Let your doctor know beforehand what tablets you are taking.

#### **YOU NEED TO FAST**

**Have nothing to eat or drink for six hours before the procedure is done.**

If you have diabetes or have heart valve disease or have a pacemaker implanted or are taking blood thinning tablets such as Warfarin it is important to discuss this with your doctor before the colonoscopy is organised as special arrangements may be necessary.



*Colonoscopy examines the entire length of the large bowel.*

### Will I be given sedation or anaesthetic?

Yes. Before the procedure either a sedative injection or a light anaesthetic is given into the vein to make you comfortable.

### How is colonoscopy done?

The colonoscopy is performed while you lie on your left side, although occasionally it may be necessary for you to lie on your back at some stage during the procedure. The instrument is inserted through the back passage. Most colonoscopies take between 20 and 45 minutes.

### What is a polyp?

A polyp is a small growth attached to the bowel wall which over time can occasionally become a cancer. If polyps are found they are usually removed at the time of the examination. Most polyps can be burnt off by placing a wire snare around the base and applying an electric current. However it will not be possible to discuss the removal with you during the examination as you will be asleep. If you have any questions please ask your doctor before the colonoscopy.

If necessary, small samples or biopsies of the bowel can be taken for examination.

### What happens after colonoscopy?

Following the procedure you will remain in the hospital recovery area for approximately two hours until the effect of the medication wears off. When you wake up you may feel a little bloated. This is due to the air that was inserted during the procedure. This will pass over the next hour or so. Very rarely, you may pass a small amount of blood. This is due to biopsies that have been taken and is of no concern. You may then go home. Because of the sedation given it is very important that you do not drive a car, travel on public transport alone, operate machinery, sign legal documents or drink alcohol on the same day after the test. It is strongly advised that a friend or relative take you home and stay with you.

#### **FOLLOWING THE PROCEDURE**

**You will remain in the hospital recovery area for approximately two hours until the effect of the medication wears off**

### Safety and risks

The colonoscope is completely cleaned between each patient to avoid the risk of transmission of serious diseases such as HIV, hepatitis B or C.

Serious complications of colonoscopy are rare, at less than one in a thousand examinations. However complications can occur and include the following:

- Colonoscopy is considered to be the most accurate test of the colon. However, there is a risk that an abnormality may not be detected.
- Intolerance of the bowel preparation. Some people develop dizziness, headaches or vomiting.
- Reaction to the sedatives or anaesthetics. This is very uncommon but is of concern in people who have severe heart disease or lung disease.
- Perforation (making a hole in the bowel).
- Major bleeding from the bowel. This can occur as a result of polyps being removed.

It is possible if these serious complications occur that you may require surgery or a blood transfusion.

- Rare side effects can occur with any procedure. Death is a very remote possibility.
- If you wish to have further details please discuss this with your doctor before the procedure.
- If you have any of the following symptoms in the hours or days after colonoscopy you should contact the hospital or your doctor's rooms immediately: severe abdominal pain, black tarry motions, persistent bleeding from the back passage, fever or other symptoms that cause you concern.

### Digestive Health Foundation

The Digestive Health Foundation (DHF) is committed to promoting better health for all Australians through education and community health programs related to the digestive system. The DHF is the educational arm of the Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA). GESA is the professional body representing the specialty of gastrointestinal and liver disease. Members of the Society are drawn from physicians, surgeons, scientists and other medical specialties with an interest in gastrointestinal disorders. GI disorders are the most common health related problems affecting the community.

Research and education into gastrointestinal disease are essential to contain the effects of these disorders on all Australians.

Further information on a wide variety of gastrointestinal conditions is available on our website.

### Digestive Health Foundation

c/- GESA

145 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Phone: (02) 9256 5454

Facsimile: (02) 9241 4586

E-mail: [gesa@gesa.org.au](mailto:gesa@gesa.org.au)

Website: <http://www.gesa.org.au>

© Copyright. Digestive Health Foundation, updated April 2003.

*This brochure is promoted as a public service by the Digestive Health Foundation. This leaflet cannot be completely comprehensive and is intended as a guide only. The information given here is current at the time of printing, but may change in the future. If you have further questions you should raise them with your own doctor.*

## COLONOSCOPY

facts about...

## COLONOSCOPY



COLONOSCOPY

Second Edition 2003



An information leaflet for patients and interested members of the general public prepared by the Digestive Health Foundation