What You Need to Know About Colonoscopy

If you are scheduled for a colonoscopy and need more information, please call:
- Palo Alto: (650) 493-5000 ext. 68971
- Livermore: (925) 373-4700 ext. 35325

Why should I have a colonoscopy?
If you are 50 or older, you should get tested for colon cancer. It is the best test available to find and treat problems in your colon. Colonoscopy can show irritated and swollen tissue, ulcers, polyps and cancer. Colonoscopy can prevent cancer.

Here are some other reasons for colonoscopy:
- A personal or family history of polyps or colon or stomach cancer
- Inflammatory bowel disease such as colitis or Crohn's disease
- Blood in your stool
- A change in your bowel habits
- Positive test for hidden blood in your stool
- Unexplained pain in your abdomen
- Unexplained weight loss

What is a colonoscopy?
A colonoscopy is a procedure that lets the doctor look inside your colon and rectum. A small, flexible tube called a colonoscope is used to look inside your intestine. The tube is put into your rectum and slowly advanced through your colon. The tube is about the size of a finger in diameter. It has a light on the end to let the doctor see inside. You will be given medicine to relax you and make you feel sleepy. The exam takes about 30-60 minutes. You may feel some mild cramping.

Tissue samples are taken when there are polyps, a growth, inflammation or other areas that need to be checked more closely. The tissue samples are sent to the lab and examined.

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How do I get ready for my colonoscopy?

Your bowel must be completely clean before you can have the procedure. If your colon is not clean or you eat or drink before the procedure, your colonoscopy will need to be rescheduled. You will need to be on a clear liquid diet all day the day before the procedure. Drink a lot of clear liquids so you don’t become dehydrated. Talk with your primary care doctor if you are on a fluid restriction.

A clear liquid diet may include:
- Broth, bouillon, tea, black coffee (no creamer, sugar is okay)
- Soda, popsicles and juice (no pulp, no red or purple)
- Jell-O and Gatorade (no red or purple)

You cannot eat:
- Solid food, alcohol, dairy or protein shakes

The day of the procedure

Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your procedure. The morning of the procedure, take your blood pressure, heart, or pain medications with only a small sip of water. If you use an inhaler, be sure to bring it with you.

Arrive at least 15 minutes before your appointment time. Plan to be here about 3 hours. You must bring someone who can drive you home after your procedure. You cannot drive yourself because you will be given medicine that makes you sleepy. Your procedure will be cancelled if you do not have a driver unless you decide to have your procedure without sedation medication. Your driver must check in with you and sign a form before the procedure. The doctor will talk with you before the procedure and have you sign a consent form. Colonoscopy is generally safe. Complications are rare but can include reaction to the sedative medication, bleeding from sample sites and puncture of the intestine wall.

After your exam, you will stay in the recovery room for about 30 minutes. You will then be discharged with your driver.