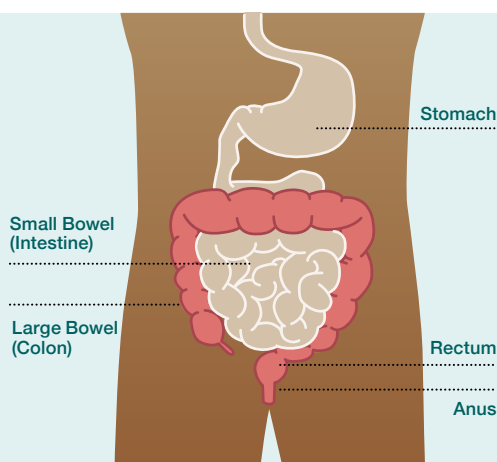


# Colonoscopy: What you need to know

## What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a medical procedure that uses a thin flexible tube with a tiny camera attached. It is used to look inside and check the health of your bowel (part of your guts).



## Why might I need a colonoscopy?

A GP or other doctor may suggest a colonoscopy if you:

- Have bowel problems
- Received a positive result from a bowel screening test ('poo test') or to follow up on other tests
- Have a family history of bowel problems.

## How will I know whether a colonoscopy is right for me?

- Your GP will refer you to a doctor or nurse who specialises in colonoscopy and bowel problems.
- The specialist consultation might be done in person, over the phone or by video link. If you need an interpreter, let the specialist's staff know at the time the appointment is made.
- The specialist will explain what a colonoscopy involves and ask about your health and any family history of bowel cancer.
- Some people do not know their family history of cancer. This could be because no one wanted to talk about cancer, or because of forced family separations.
- Feeling shame in this situation is normal for some people. Don't let this be a barrier. Ask if a family member or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker can be with you for support.
- Tell the specialist about your health, lifestyle and living conditions, so they know the full story and can give you the correct advice and treatment.
- Ask questions so you understand what a colonoscopy involves, and what might happen if you do not have a colonoscopy.
- The specialist will tell you if they think you should have a colonoscopy. They might suggest a different treatment or a test that is more suitable for you.
- If the specialist recommends a colonoscopy, you will be asked to sign a form giving your informed consent to say that you agree to go ahead with it.

## What will I need to do before the colonoscopy?

Once you decide to have a colonoscopy and give your consent, you will be given:

- An appointment to have the colonoscopy at a hospital or private day clinic
- Instructions about what to eat and drink to prepare your bowel
- A special drink for the day before the colonoscopy. The drink empties the bowel by giving you diarrhoea (the runs). You may need to get the special drink from a chemist.



## It is very important to follow the instructions to prepare your bowel the right way

- The bowel must be fully cleared so the doctor or nurse can check it carefully.
- You might have to repeat the whole process if the bowel is not cleared.
- Some people may need extra personal or health support during bowel preparation, or need to stay overnight in hospital.
- Talk to your doctor or health service if you are not sure what to do or if you have to travel a long distance to have the colonoscopy.

## You will need to plan how to get to and from your colonoscopy appointment

The colonoscopy will only take about half an hour, but you will need to stay at the hospital or clinic for about five hours in total.

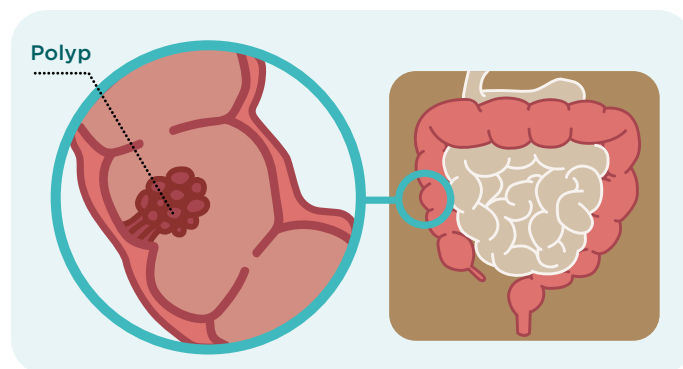
You will need someone to pick you up after the procedure and stay with you overnight to make sure you are okay.



## What happens during my colonoscopy?

You have completed the bowel preparation and arrived for your colonoscopy appointment.

- You will be given a medicine to relax you (called sedation). You will not be aware of what happens during the colonoscopy.
- A thin, flexible tube will slide into your rectum and up into the bowel. You will not feel this.
- The tube has a tiny camera attached (called a colonoscope). The specialist doctor or nurse will use the camera to check inside your bowel.
- If any polyps (small growths) are seen on the bowel, these may be removed during the colonoscopy.
- If many or larger polyps are found, you may be given a follow-up colonoscopy appointment to remove these polyps.



## What happens after my colonoscopy?

- You will usually be able to go home about two hours after the colonoscopy, once the effects of the sedation have worn off.
- You will also be given an after-hours number to call if you have any problems after going home.
- Before you leave hospital, you will be told how your colonoscopy went, and given information about any follow-up needed. You and your doctor will also be sent a report about the colonoscopy and its results.

## Your rights as a patient

If a colonoscopy is recommended, you have the right to:

- Ask questions and decide whether you want to go ahead with the colonoscopy. This is called giving informed consent. You can ask more questions, or withdraw your consent, at any time
- Be treated by a qualified and well-trained person at the right time and in the right way
- Get a clear, written explanation after the colonoscopy so you and your GP know what happened, what was found and what to do next
- Speak to patient services, your GP or specialist if you feel you did not receive the right level of clinical care during the colonoscopy.

## More resources

This fact sheet and the Colonoscopy Clinical Care Standard and other information for consumers can be downloaded from:

[www.safetyandquality.gov.au/ccs](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/ccs)

For more about colonoscopy and bowel cancer screening see:

[www.indigenousbowelscreen.com.au](http://www.indigenousbowelscreen.com.au)

[www.health.gov.au/nbcsp](http://www.health.gov.au/nbcsp)

## Questions for your doctor? Write them here:

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