

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

Colonoscopy is a procedure in which the inside of the entire colon can be looked at with an instrument called a *colonoscope*. Also, if something abnormal is seen, a small piece of it (a *biopsy*) can be taken for examination in the pathology laboratory.

The inside of the bowel can also be examined by filling the bowel with barium and taking x-ray pictures of it (a *lower GI series*). For some diseases, it is the best way to make a diagnosis. An important drawback to a barium enema is that the bowel lining cannot be looked at directly. Also, a biopsy cannot be done at that time if something abnormal is seen. The person needs to return for a colonoscopy.

THE COLONOSCOPE

- The colonoscope is a smooth, flexible, optical instrument about as thick as the tip of your little finger. It has lenses in it as well as a light at its tip that lets the operator see what is ahead.
- The colonoscope has several small tunnels in it.
 - One tunnel is used to suck out any mucus that might be in the way.
 - Another tunnel is used to pass a very thin wire with a biting tip as small as a sesame seed at its end that can be used to take a biopsy.

The colonoscope is 3 feet long so that it can be passed up to the very beginning of the large bowel. The end held by the operator has a knob and several buttons that are used to steer the tip of the colonoscope as it is passed up the colon. The buttons are used to control the suction and other functions.

PREPARATION FOR THE COLONOSCOPY

- The bowel must be cleansed of all stool so that the lining can be seen clearly. You will be instructed on how to clean your bowel.
- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the procedure.

THE COLONOSCOPY PROCEDURE

- A thin needle will be used to start some fluids in your vein.
- The procedure will begin with you lying on your side.
- Medicine will be injected through the needle in your vein, and you will feel very drowsy.
- The colonoscope will be lubricated thoroughly and inserted gently through the anus and into the colon. You will be vaguely aware of what is happening, or you may simply doze off. The instrument will be advanced through the entire colon for a thorough examination (Fig. 1).

- You will be able to hear and cooperate with the doctor as you are asked to change your position, but you will not be too aware of what is happening.
- When the procedure is completed, the relaxing medicine is stopped, and within a few minutes you will be fully awake.
- The procedure takes 15 to 30 minutes. Many patients remember so little of the procedure they think it took just several minutes, or they may not remember anything at all about it.
- Your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing will be watched until they are stable. When you are completely alert, you should be able to go home with a responsible adult.

Colonoscopy has become an important way to examine the inside of the entire colon directly.

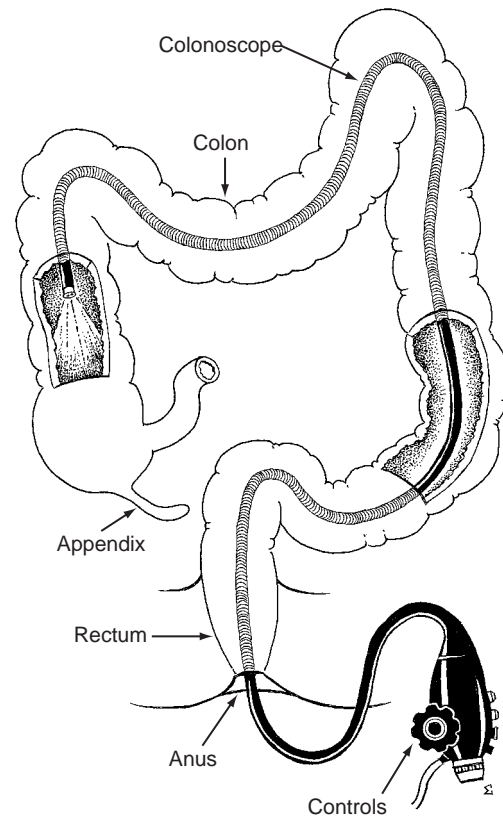


Figure 1. The lubricated colonoscope is inserted in the anus and then advanced through the entire colon. On occasion it can even be advanced up the small intestine (the ileum) for a short distance. The controls are used to steer the direction of the tip of the colonoscope as well as to regulate suction and other functions.