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## Colonoscopy

When you arrive for your procedure, a member of our team will ask you to sign an *informed consent* indicating that you understand the procedure. An *informed consent* is when you, the patient or legal representative, are able to show that you understand why a treatment or procedure is needed, how it will be performed, and any possible risks. Read the handout below or view the video “Preparing for your colonoscopy” at <https://uvahealth.com/services/colon-cancer-care/colonoscopy> to understand your informed consent.

### What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy examines the large intestine (colon) for irritated and swollen tissue, ulcers, polyps, and cancer. The doctor uses a colonoscope, a small flexible tube with a light at the end that will pass gently through your anus into the rectum and colon.

### What can I expect to happen during a colonoscopy?

You will lie on your left side, knees drawn up toward your chest. The doctor will insert the colonoscope through your rectum, inject air, and then gently pass the scope through your colon. You might feel pressure or cramping during the procedure, but a colonoscopy rarely causes much pain. The doctor may give you medication to help you relax and better tolerate any discomfort. You will likely receive sedation which means you will be asleep for most of the procedure and should not feel any discomfort. The procedure usually takes less than 45 minutes.

### Why did my doctor recommend a colonoscopy?

A Colonoscopy may be recommended as a test to screen for colorectal cancer. A colonoscopy can find cancers at earlier stages, and polyps can be found and removed before they become cancerous. This greatly improves the chances for treating colorectal cancer successfully and reduces the chance that a person will die from colorectal cancer. A colonoscopy can also be used to evaluate symptoms such as bleeding and chronic diarrhea.

### What are the risks of a colonoscopy?

The risks associated with a colonoscopy are rare. Serious complications include:

- Injury from the scope or removal of a polyp during the colonoscopy may cause bleeding during or after the procedure.
- A tear or a hole in the colon or rectum requiring surgical care (perforation).
- Infection
- Aspiration that may lead to a lung infection (pneumonia).
- A reaction to the sedating medication, including breathing or heart problems.
- Sedation or complications from the colonoscopy may cause injury to an unborn baby. Notify the doctor or staff if you are, or could be, pregnant.

Risks are higher in people taking steroids or anti-coagulation medicines, or in people that have significant underlying diseases. There is also a risk that cancer or polyps will not be detected. Contact your doctor if you notice severe abdominal pain, fever and chills, or rectal bleeding after your procedure.

### What are the alternatives?

There are other screening tests that may detect abnormalities. A colonoscopy is the only screening test that allows the doctor to take a sample tissue and/or remove polyps during the procedure, making it the only screening test that can both find and prevent colorectal cancer.