



Australian Government

**NATIONAL  
BOWELCANCER**  
SCREENING PROGRAM

# Information about getting a colonoscopy



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**Your bowel screening test found blood in your poo. There could be several reasons why blood was found; most are not related to cancer, but it is important to find out the cause.**

☐ **Make an appointment to discuss your positive test result with your doctor.** Your doctor may recommend a test called a colonoscopy.

## **About colonoscopy**

A colonoscopy is a procedure that uses a thin flexible tube with a tiny camera attached, called a colonoscope (scope), to look inside your bowel.

A doctor will give you medicine to relax you (called sedation).

While you are lying down, the doctor will insert the scope through your bottom and into your bowel to look for polyps or growths.

You will not feel this or be aware of what happens during the colonoscopy.

The procedure takes up to 45 minutes. You can expect to be at the hospital for 3 to 4 hours.

You can choose to have your colonoscopy in a public or private hospital or clinic.

## **Why would my doctor recommend a colonoscopy?**

- A colonoscopy is the best way to check for the cause of bleeding.
- During a colonoscopy, the doctor will usually remove any polyps or growths found.
- A polyp is a small growth attached to the bowel wall that can sometimes develop into cancer.
- Removing polyps can help prevent cancer and is painless.
- Polyps or growths removed are tested by the laboratory to see if they are malignant (cancerous) or benign (harmless).

## How do I prepare for colonoscopy?

If you have any health problems or take regular medicine talk to your doctor before you start your bowel preparation. They may tell you to stop taking some medicines for a few days before your colonoscopy.

You will be told how to prepare, which involves:

- **Diet.** What to eat and drink in the days before your colonoscopy.
- **Bowel preparation.** How to get a kit with medicine which will make you go to the toilet to empty your bowel.

You must follow the bowel preparation instructions carefully so the doctor can see inside your bowel. Otherwise, you may need to have the colonoscopy again.

## What happens after colonoscopy?

When you wake up from the colonoscopy you will be given something to eat and drink. You may feel a little bloated, but this will only last about an hour. You might pass a small amount of blood, but this is normal.

You will be told how it went, how to care for yourself when you get home, when to restart your normal diet and medications, and any follow-up that is required. A friend or family member must take you home and stay with you.

You and your doctor will be given a report about the colonoscopy and any laboratory test results.

You or your doctor should report your laboratory result to the National Cancer Screening Register.

Because you are given sedation, for the 24 hours after your colonoscopy do not:

- drive a car
- travel alone
- use machinery
- sign legal papers
- drink alcohol.

## How accurate is a colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy is very accurate and is the best way to find out why you had a positive test result. There is still a small chance something could be missed during your procedure.

If no cancer or polyps are found, you should continue to screen with the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. When you are next due to screen, we will send you another test.

## Are there any risks or side-effects?

Side effects following a colonoscopy are not common. You may have a headache or vomiting from the bowel preparation or have bleeding after the colonoscopy. You might have a reaction to the sedation, but this is rare. Very rarely, some people need to go back into hospital.

You should talk to your doctor about any risks or concerns before your colonoscopy.

## Is there a cost for a colonoscopy?

There is no cost for a colonoscopy as a public patient in a public hospital. You may have to pay if you have a colonoscopy as a private patient, depending on your private health insurance. You may need to pay for the bowel preparation kit.

## Questions?

This brochure can help you understand the colonoscopy procedure. Your doctor or the hospital can give you more information.



Find out more about the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

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