Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Bowel Preparation for Your First Visit With Your Colorectal Surgeon

This information will help you get ready for your first appointment with your colorectal (KOH-loh-REK-tul) surgeon.

During your first appointment with your surgeon, you may have a flexible sigmoidoscopy (sig-MOY-DOS-koh-pee). This is an exam of your lower colon (large intestine) and rectum (the last part of your colon).

If you're having a flexible sigmoidoscopy, you may be asked to do a bowel preparation (prep) beforehand. A bowel prep is when you clean out your lower colon. It helps clear the stool (poop) from your body.

If you need to do a bowel prep, your surgeon's office will tell you where it will be done. It can be done either at home before your appointment or in the clinic at your appointment.

Not all flexible sigmoidoscopies need a bowel prep. It depends on the reason for your appointment. Your surgeon's office will tell you what to expect.

About your flexible sigmoidoscopy

When it's time for your procedure, you'll go into the exam room and be helped onto an exam table. You will lie on your left side.

During your procedure, your healthcare provider will use an endoscope (EN-doh-SKOPE) to look inside your rectum and lower colon. An endoscope is a thin, flexible tube with a light and camera on the end of it. Your healthcare provider will use this camera to take pictures and guide where the endoscope goes. They will see video from the camera on a monitor next to them.

If your healthcare provider sees anything unusual, they may do a biopsy. This means they will take a small tissue sample to look at it more closely. For example, if you have a polyp (PAH-lip), your healthcare provider may take a sample of it. A polyp is a small, abnormal (not normal) growth on the inner lining of your rectum or lower colon. Most polyps are benign (not cancer), but some can be cancerous or precancerous (lead to cancer).

The procedure takes about 5 to 10 minutes. You will not need sedation (medication that makes you sleepy) during the procedure.

What to do before your appointment

Your surgeon's office will tell you if you need to do a bowel prep. If you do, follow the instructions in this section and the "What to do the day of your appointment" section.

Tell your surgeon's office if you have rectal pain or bleeding

Make sure to tell your surgeon's office if:

- You have serious (very bad) pain in or around your rectum.
- Your rectum is bleeding. For example, you might see bright red blood in your stool after a bowel movement (pooping). You might also see a few drops of blood in the toilet or on toilet paper.

If you have any of these symptoms, you may not need to do a bowel prep.

Tell your surgeon's office if you're taking blood thinner medication

Make sure to tell your surgeon's office if you're taking any blood thinners. Blood thinners are medications that affect the way your blood clots. If you take blood thinners, ask the healthcare provider performing your procedure what to do. They may recommend you stop taking the medication. This will depend on the type of procedure you're having and the reason you're taking blood thinners.

Here are some examples of blood thinners. There are others, so be sure your

care team knows all the medicines you take. **Do not stop taking your blood thinner without talking with a member of your care team.**

- Apixaban (Eliquis®)
- Aspirin
- Celecoxib (Celebrex®)
- Cilostazol (Pletal®)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix®)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa®)
- Dalteparin (Fragmin®)
- Dipyridamole (Persantine®)
- Edoxaban (Savaysa®)
- Enoxaparin (Lovenox®)
- Fondaparinux (Arixtra®)
- Heparin injection (shot)
- Meloxicam (Mobic®)
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®)
- Pentoxifylline (Trental®)
- Prasugrel (Effient®)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)
- Sulfasalazine (Azulfidine®, Sulfazine®)
- Ticagrelor (Brilinta®)
- Tinzaparin (Innohep®)
- Warfarin (Jantoven®, Coumadin®)

Buy supplies

If you need to do a bowel prep, you will use an enema to clean out your lower colon. An enema is when liquid is put into your rectum through your anus to cause a bowel movement.

If you're doing your bowel prep at home, you will need to give yourself 2 enemas. Buy 2 (4.5-ounce) saline enemas (such as Fleet® saline enemas). You can buy these at your local pharmacy without a prescription.

If your bowel prep will be done in the clinic, do not buy any enemas. Your surgeon's office will give you the supplies you need at your appointment.

What to do the day of your appointment

- **Eat and drink like you normally do.** You do not need to follow any special diet. It's important to eat before your appointment so you do not feel dizzy or lightheaded (like you might faint) afterward.
- **Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking your medications the morning of your appointment.** It's OK to take them with a few small sips of water. Depending on what medications you take, this may be all, some, or none of your usual morning medications.

- **If you're doing your bowel prep at home:**
  - Give yourself the first enema 2 hours before you leave for your appointment. Follow the instructions on the package.
  - Give yourself the second enema 30 minutes later.
- **If your bowel prep will be done in the clinic:**
  - Your surgeon's office will give you the supplies you need at your appointment.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns, call your colorectal surgeon's office. You can reach a staff member Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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