



Patient Education Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

What is a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy?

A flexible sigmoidoscopy is a procedure that enables your gastroenterologist to examine the lining of the rectum and a portion of the colon (Large Bowel) for abnormalities. This is done by inserting a flexible tube that is about the thickness of your finger into your anus and advancing it slowly into the rectum and colon.

What preparation is required?

The colon and rectum must be completely clean for the procedure to be accurate and complete. Your gastroenterologist will give you detailed instructions regarding the dietary restrictions to be followed and the cleansing routine to be used. In general, preparation consists of either consumption of a large volume of a special cleansing solution or several days of clear liquids, laxatives, and enemas prior to the examination. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully. If you do not, the procedure may have to be cancelled and repeated at a later date.

What about my current medications?

Most medications may be continued as usual, but some medications can interfere with the preparation or the examination. Therefore, it is best to inform your gastroenterologist of your current medications, as well as any allergies to medications at least two (2) weeks prior to your procedure. Aspirin products, arthritis medications, anticoagulants (blood thinners), insulin, and iron products are examples of medications that should be discussed with your gastroenterologist prior to the examination. You should alert your doctor if you require antibiotics prior to undergoing dental procedures, since you may need antibiotics prior to flexible sigmoidoscopy as well.

What can be expected during a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy?

After your preoperative assessment has been completed by our staff, you will be taken into the procedure suite. At this time you will meet an Endoscopy Technician who will assist the Gastroenterologist and the Anesthesiologist or Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist. You will be repositioned to lay on your back or on your side. At this time the Anesthesiologist or Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist will administer your sedation for the procedure. Once the medication takes the necessary effect the gastroenterologists will begin the procedure. The colonoscope will slowly be advanced through the rectum and colon (Large Intestine), and slowly removed as the lining of the rectum and colon is carefully inspected. The procedure usually takes between 5 to 15 minutes.

What if a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy shows something abnormal?

If the gastroenterologist examines an area of the rectum or colon (Large Intestine) that requires further evaluation a biopsy of the tissue is obtained by using forceps. The biopsy is sent to the pathology laboratory for analysis. If polyps are found, they are generally removed.

If the flexible sigmoidoscopy is being performed to identify sites of bleeding, the areas of bleeding may be controlled through the colonoscope by injecting certain medications into the tissue or by coagulation (sealing off bleeding vessels with heat treatment).

None of these procedures cause pain. Biopsies can be taken for many reasons and does not necessarily mean that cancer is expected.

What are polyps and why are they removed?

Polyps are abnormal growths on the lining of the colon. Polyps vary in size from a tiny dot to several inches in length. The majority of polyps are benign (noncancerous), but the gastroenterologist cannot always tell a benign from a malignant (cancerous) polyp. It is for this reason biopsies are done on polyps so they can be further analyzed.

How are polyps removed?

Small polyps may be totally removed by fulguration (burning), but larger polyps are removed by a technique called snare polypectomy. The doctor passes a wire loop (snare) through the colonoscope and then severs the polyp from the intestinal wall by means of an electrical current. You will feel no pain during a polypectomy.



What happens after a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy?

Once the procedure is over, you will be taken out of the procedure room and moved into the recovery area. You will be closely monitored by a Registered Nurse as you wake up from the anesthesia. Once you are awake, you will be given tasty crackers and something to drink. The gastroenterologist will then go over all the findings from the procedure, and you will be discharged home.

A flexible sigmoidoscopy is usually well tolerated and is rarely painful. Some patients experience the feeling of pressure, bloating, or cramping after the procedure. This is caused by the infusion of air into the colon during the procedure. Depending on your anatomy the gastroenterologist may need to infuse air into the colon to get a better visual of the lining of the colon. If discomfort is experienced during recovery the gastroenterologist will give you medication to assist with the discomfort.

Everyone's body metabolizes the medications administered during the procedure differently, it is for this reason you need a family member or a responsible adult to accompany you home. Driving after a procedure like this is considered Driving Under the Influence (D.U.I.). Your judgement and reflexes will be impaired after the procedure so it is encouraged that you do not sign any important documents or operate machinery the day of the procedure.

What are possible complications of a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy?

Though a flexible sigmoidoscopy is a very common procedure, very rarely a complication may occur.

One possible complication is a perforation or tear through the bowel wall, this requires surgical intervention at a hospital.

Bleeding may occur from the site of biopsy or polypectomy. This is usually minor and stops on its own. In the event the bleed cannot be controlled at the center, you will be transferred to Phoenixville Hospital.

Aspiration pneumonia as result of the anesthesia.

Other complications include allergic reaction to sedatives, and complications from heart or lung disease.

Our staff has extensive training in the response to these complications.

In the days that follow your procedure please call the center if you experience: severe abdominal pain, fever and chills, rectal bleeding that is more than half a cup.

To the patient

Providing education about the procedure and answering all your questions is among our top priorities. If you have any questions about alternative testing, the cost of the procedure, methods of billing, or insurance coverage, do not hesitate to speak with gastroenterologist or the staff at the center