

New Connections

HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 20

*"A colonoscopy
isn't a big deal.
It just isn't."*



Despite all of the public service messages, there are still a lot of people who *should* get screened for colon cancer who have not been screened. A colonoscopy is not only an easy, painless procedure; it's an excellent screening tool for colon cancer because it cannot only stop colon cancer before it starts, it can find it early and nip it in the bud.

The procedure defined

A colonoscopy is a procedure that closely examines the inside of the rectum and the 5-foot long colon, inspecting for pre-cancerous or cancerous polyps.

The procedure uses an instrument called a colonoscope, which is a slender, flexible, lighted tube about the thickness of a finger. On the end of the colonoscope is a tiny video camera. The colonoscope is gently eased through the rectum and into the colon where it takes pictures of the inside and sends them to a TV monitor for the doctor to see. Small puffs of air are introduced into the colon to keep it open and allow the doctor to see clearly.

Sedation makes it completely painless

Shortly before the procedure, an IV is inserted into a vein in the patient's arm or hand. Then, when the doctor is ready to begin the actual procedure, a mild sedative is first administered through the IV. The patient is then "asleep" during the actual procedure.

It takes only a short while

The patient is asked to arrive about 45 minutes before the procedure for preparation. The procedure itself takes only about 30 minutes and then the patient remains in the facility for another half hour or so while he or she awakens from the anesthesia. Most people feel a bit woozy afterwards, but otherwise fine.

Performed by professionals in a private setting

A colonoscopy is performed by a doctor, usually a gastroenterologist or a surgeon, in a private room of a hospital's outpatient department, a clinic, an ambulatory surgery center, or a doctor's office.

Patients prepare the day before

Since the goal is to have the colon as cleansed as possible, patients have an approximate 36-hour preparation period leading up to the procedure. This usually involves the combination of a special diet and strong laxatives, so patients should plan on frequent use of the bathroom. Many patients like to schedule the procedure for a Monday so that the preparation day falls on the weekend when they are at home.

If a polyp is found, it's removed

This is the genius of a colonoscopy. Not only does the colonoscope view the polyps if present, it can remove them on the spot, thereby preventing colon cancer from ever starting. If a polyp looks suspicious for pre-cancer or cancer, it will be removed and biopsied. Treatment should be prompt, however only after careful decisions about treatment options are considered. The sooner it is treated, the more successful the treatment.

When your doctor says, “do it,” do it

It's important for people to talk with their doctors to understand their personal risk for getting colon cancer, guidelines for testing, and whether they need to start being tested at age 50 or possibly earlier. Remember, 9 out of 10 of people whose colon cancer is discovered early will be alive 5 years later. And many will live normal lifespans.

A colonoscopy is one of several tests available for finding colon cancer early. Talk with your doctor about which test is best for you.

**For more cancer information, call 1-800-ACS-2345
or visit www.cancer.org, anytime, day or night.**

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