

Colonoscopy: What to Expect When Your Doctor Wants an Inside Look

March 10 2009

Colorectal cancer is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in the United States with more than 140,000 cases diagnosed each year. It is also one of the most preventable cancers. Since March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, now is the perfect time to schedule that colonoscopy you've been putting off. To help calm your fears, Dale Burleson, M.D., colorectal surgeon on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Frisco, explains the details of the test -- it's not as scary as some people think.

1. PreparationThe most difficult part of the [colonoscopy](#) may be the prep: Taking a laxative pill or drink to empty or "flush" the colon. "It's not nearly as bad as it's made out to be," says Dr. Burleson. "It only takes a few hours. By the time you're ready for bed, you're all set." Why is it necessary? The cleaner the colon, the better the view, and the less likely that something small might get missed.

2. ExamThe exam itself is probably the easiest part, says Dr. Burleson. "The patient is awake, but with sedation, there's little or no discomfort. Many patients have told me it wasn't nearly as scary as they expected."

During the procedure, the physician inserts a long, flexible tube with a [tiny video camera](#) into the body. The camera sends images to a monitor, allowing the physician to get a good look around. The resulting images can be printed and stored in the computer.

3. EvaluationWhat are doctors looking for? Inflammation, bleeding,

ulcers, changes in color and [polyps](#), which are small growths of tissue. Although most polyps are non-cancerous, they are generally surgically removed and a biopsy is taken—just to be sure. “The normal lining of the colon should look like the inside of a cheek; completely smooth,” adds Dr. Burleson. “We’re looking for anything that might signal a digestive condition or early signs of [cancer](#).”

If you’re age 50 or older or if you have a family history of colorectal cancer, it may be time for you to schedule a colonoscopy.

Provided by Baylor Health Care System

Citation: Colonoscopy: What to Expect When Your Doctor Wants an Inside Look (2009, March 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-colonoscopy-doctor.html>

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