

# Colonoscopy

## What to expect



# Information Guide

## Colonoscopy

This guide provides information for Medibank Private Members and their families about colonoscopy.

It is important that you're well prepared for your colonoscopy, and know what to expect at key stages prior to, during and following this procedure.

It is also important that you discuss your particular circumstances in detail with the healthcare professionals who will be treating and caring for you. You should be confident in the treatment choices you make with your health care team and ensure that they are aware of your individual needs.

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Call us on 13 23 31 before you go to hospital to find out what you're covered for, any likely additional costs you may have to pay as well as for any other advice you may need.

The information provided in this brochure is current at the time of issue, July 2008.

# Colonoscopy

## What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a procedure performed by a specialist doctor to see inside your colon (large intestine or large bowel), using a flexible tube-like instrument that can be viewed using a microscope or on a television monitor.

The procedure allows the doctor to take samples for pathology testing, and polyps or other abnormal tissue may also be biopsied during colonoscopy.

## Why is a colonoscopy performed?

A colonoscopy is performed to investigate a range of conditions including:

- Blood in your stool or bleeding from your rectum (back passage) or anus
- Unexplained abdominal pain, anaemia or other symptoms which require further investigation
- Significant change in bowel habits
- Family history of bowel cancer

If you are aged over 50, a colonoscopy may be performed as part of routine precautionary screening for bowel cancer.

## Referral to a specialist

A colonoscopy is a specialised procedure usually performed by a gastroenterologist. Your GP should refer you to a suitable specialist.

As well as advice from your GP, you may wish to know more about the procedure and what you can expect from your specialist. The Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA) is Australia's peak body for the discipline of gastroenterology. Their website [www.gesa.org.au](http://www.gesa.org.au) is an online resource for consumers seeking further information.

Cost of treatment may also be an important consideration when selecting a specialist. A list of gastroenterologists who have participated in Medibank Private's GapCover Scheme in the past can be found on our website [medibank.com.au](http://medibank.com.au).

Note: Specialists can choose to participate in GapCover on a **case-by-case** basis.

More information about GapCover can also be found on our website or in our *'Going to Hospital'* brochure.

## What should I discuss with my doctors?

- discuss the treatment options for your condition and why colonoscopy is being recommended
- ask what the possible outcomes are for each of the options you have discussed
- ask what is the likelihood of each of these outcomes occurring
- why your doctor has recommended a particular specialist in your case
- what experience does the specialist have, for example number of colonoscopies performed and outcomes for patients, including complication rates
- possible risks and outcomes associated with the procedure
- when any pathology results will be known
- typical recovery time
- arrangements for getting home and after care
- possible further treatment

Ideally, you should make sure that you fully understand the procedure that is going to be performed. Your specialist should explain in detail how the colonoscopy is done, and what preparation you should make. Your doctor may provide you with written material to read at home.

Your Medibank Private *'Going to Hospital'* booklet contains some questions that you may wish to ask your doctor when considering colonoscopy, including information on obtaining informed financial consent.

### **Where is it done?**

A colonoscopy is performed in either a day surgery or hospital.

### **How long will it take?**

Time required for the colonoscopy will vary with individual circumstances, but typically takes approximately 30 minutes with 1-4 hours recovery time following the procedure when sedation has been administered.

### **Who is involved?**

Healthcare professionals usually involved in the procedure are:

- your gastroenterologist
- anaesthetist. Colonoscopy does not require a general anaesthetic however it does require intravenous sedation given by the anaesthetist
- a pathologist may conduct analysis of any specimens collected
- nurses will assist during the procedure and recovery

### **How to prepare**

Your specialist should provide detailed advice on the preparation required in your particular case, but in general:

- you will need to fast, that is have nothing to eat or drink, for six hours prior to the procedure
- you should obtain medical advice about taking prescribed medications prior to the procedure
- your colon will need to be empty to enable a thorough examination. Your specialist will advise you about specific bowel preparation for the procedure. Bowel preparation is usually done by you, at home, the night before the procedure.

### **What happens on arrival at the day surgery or hospital?**

When you arrive at day surgery or hospital, you will be admitted. Necessary paperwork will need to be completed.

Prior to the procedure your specialist will ask you to sign a consent form, indicating that you give him or her permission to perform the procedure and that you understand all potential risks and complications.

### **What to expect during the colonoscopy**

Following admission, you will be taken to the procedure room and prepared for the colonoscopy. An anaesthetist may see you during this time. Preparation includes a sedative injection to make you very drowsy, and an intravenous drip may also be administered to replace fluids lost during pre-procedure bowel preparation.

Once the sedative takes effect, your specialist will slowly insert the colonoscope and the colon will be examined.

## What happens after the colonoscopy?

You will wake up in a recovery area and will be asked to rest until the effects of the sedation have worn off. You may experience minor side effects following the procedure, including bloating, discomfort or light bleeding.

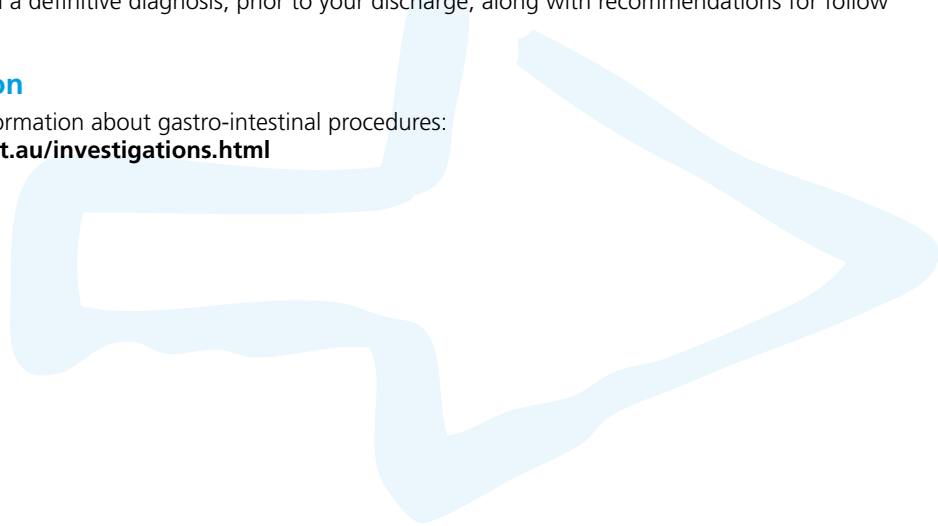
You should arrange for a friend or relative to accompany you when you leave as you should not drive yourself home after the procedure. The day surgery or hospital should give you specific instructions about any side effects you may experience once home, and any symptoms for which further assistance should be sought.

Your specialist may inform you of the examination results or probable findings prior to your discharge from the recovery area. As pathology results usually take three to four days, in these cases your specialist may give you a presumptive, rather than a definitive diagnosis, prior to your discharge, along with recommendations for follow up as required.

## Further information

Australian consumer information about gastro-intestinal procedures:

**<http://www.gastro.net.au/investigations.html>**





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