

Information about

Bowel Preparation

For patients undergoing a colonoscopy or certain types of surgery, it is essential that the colon (bowel) be thoroughly cleaned and emptied of all solid matter (poo). Cleansing the colon is called bowel preparation, or bowel prep.

What is the purpose of bowel preparation?

The goal of bowel preparation is to empty and clean the bowel for a diagnostic procedure (such as a colonoscopy) or for surgery (such as removal of polyps, cancer, or narrowing of the intestinal diameter).

Why is bowel preparation important?

A good bowel preparation allows the doctor to clearly see the lining of the bowel and thoroughly examine the colon. The procedure is then more likely to be accurate and complete.

If the bowel is not completely clean and empty the procedure may need to be postponed or repeated. Potential complications may also occur or potential cancer lesions could be missed.





What exactly is a bowel preparation?

Your doctor will prescribe a bowel preparation that is best for you.

In general, you can expect to:

1. Modify your diet

Your doctor may recommend a low residue or fibre-free diet one or two days before the procedure. You may be asked to follow a clear liquid diet including vegetable or beef broth, black tea and coffee, clear fruit juices (the ones you can see through, i.e. apple or white grape juice) and soda water.

2. Take a laxative or bowel preparation medication

As the laxatives do their job, you'll start spending a lot of time on the toilet. This medication causes diarrhoea and empties the colon. The medication is taken by mouth and comes as liquid, powder or tablets, depending on which preparation your doctor has prescribed.

3. Increase your fluid intake

Drink additional glasses of water to prevent dehydration.

REMEMBER TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS - AND TAKE IT!



Bowel preparation may be difficult for some people to complete. Talk to your doctor about any concerns you have.

Are there different types of bowel preparation medications?

Yes. There are several effective bowel preparation medications (laxatives) available. Common brand names include PicoPrep®, GlycoPrep®, Fleet Phospho-Soda®, ColonLYTELY®, Picolax®, GoLYTELY® and MoviPrep®. Kits including combinations of these products are also available. Your doctor may recommend one of these or another agent.

Read the packet information and carefully follow your doctor's instructions about the exact dose and timing of your medication. You may purchase specific medications from your doctor or over the counter at your local pharmacy.

What determines the type of bowel preparation you receive?

Your medical condition is the most important factor determining which bowel preparation medication is best for you. Tell your doctor if you have:

- A history of bowel obstruction
- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Experienced difficulty with bowel preparations in the past
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Any current or previous heart, kidney or liver diseases
- Any allergies
- If you are pregnant or breast feeding.

Other factors taken into consideration include the timing of the procedure, individual preferences (taste or amount of medication) and cost.

What are the common side-effects?

Your doctor will explain the possible side-effects of the bowel preparation medication selected for you.

In general, bowel preparations are safe, and most patients have no medical problems with taking the bowel preparation.

The type and severity of side-effects vary among patients and the product used. Mild nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, intestinal gas, dry mouth, and increased thirst are the most common side-effects of these products.

Under extremely rare conditions, a bowel preparation can cause kidney failure, heart failure or seizures. Discuss any concerns about this with your doctor.

Patients who have an allergic reaction to a medication will develop hives, swelling of the face or hands, swelling or tingling in the throat or mouth, difficulty breathing, or tightness in the chest. If you experience any of these symptoms **call a doctor or an ambulance immediately**. This type of reaction is a medical emergency.

Can I continue to take my other medications?

Tell your doctor about all the medications and supplements you are taking, especially aspirin products, arthritis medications, anticoagulants (blood thinners such as warfarin or heparin), clopidogrel, diabetes medications or iron products. Some can interfere with either the bowel preparation or the procedure.

Most medications can be continued.

What if I forget or remember too late to finish the preparation?

Call your doctor and ask what to do if you are not able to complete the bowel preparation as advised.

What if travel requirements, age or disability makes bowel preparation difficult?

It is important to discuss these issues with your referring doctor or specialist.

A disabled, elderly or frail person may be admitted to hospital for supervision during the bowel preparation. Patients who live in a rural or remote location, and are required to travel significant distance for their bowel procedure, may require access to local accommodation to undertake their bowel preparation.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or need advice please consult your doctor.

This information is relevant for adult patients – recommendations are slightly different for children.

Digestive Health Foundation

This information leaflet has been designed by the Digestive Health Foundation (DHF) as an aid to people who are about to have an endoscopic procedure or for those who wish to know more about it. This is not meant to replace individualised advice from your medical practitioner.

The DHF is an educational body committed to promoting better health for all Australians by promoting education and community health programs related to the digestive system.

The DHF is the educational arm of the Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA). GESA is the professional body representing the specialty of gastrointestinal and liver disease. Members of the Society are drawn from physicians, surgeons, scientists and other medical specialties with an interest in gastrointestinal (GI) disorders. GI disorders are the most common health related problems affecting the community.

Research and education into gastrointestinal disease are essential to contain the effects of these disorders on all Australians.

Further information on a wide variety of gastrointestinal and liver conditions is available on our website – www.gesa.org.au

dhf

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