

Colonoscopy

What is a Colonoscopy?

A **colonoscopy** is a procedure that allows a doctor to examine the lining of the **large bowel (colon) and rectum** using a **thin, flexible tube with a camera**, called a colonoscope.

The procedure allows the doctor to:

- Look for inflammation, ulcers, polyps, or cancer
- Take tissue samples (**biopsies**)
- Remove polyps if found

Why Might I Need the Procedure?

Indications for colonoscopy include:

- Rectal bleeding or blood in the stool
- Change in bowel habit (e.g. persistent diarrhoea or constipation)
- Unexplained abdominal pain
- Iron deficiency anaemia
- Unexplained weight loss
- Abnormal stool tests (e.g. positive faecal occult blood test)
- Surveillance for bowel polyps or colorectal cancer
- Assessment of inflammatory bowel disease

What Are the Benefits of Colonoscopy?

- Most accurate test for detecting **bowel cancer and polyps**
- Allows **early diagnosis and prevention of cancer** by removing polyps
- Enables biopsies to diagnose inflammation, infection, or other conditions
- Some problems can be **treated during the same procedure**

What Are the Alternatives?

Alternatives depend on your symptoms and may include:

- Stool tests (e.g. faecal occult blood or FIT)
- CT colonography ("virtual colonoscopy")
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Blood tests or imaging studies

These alternatives may not detect all abnormalities or allow biopsy or treatment.

How Is the Procedure Performed?

1. You will need **bowel preparation** beforehand to clean the colon.
2. You will usually receive **sedation** to help you relax.
3. The colonoscope is passed gently through the rectum and along the colon.
4. Air or carbon dioxide is used to expand the bowel for better views.
5. Polyps may be removed and biopsies taken if required.

What Are the Risks and Complications?

Colonoscopy is a **common and generally safe procedure**, but complications can occur.

Things That Increase My Risk

- Increasing age
- Significant heart or lung disease
- Blood-thinning medications
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Large or multiple polyps
- Poor bowel preparation
- Emergency or complex procedures

General Risks of Any Procedure or Sedation

Complication

Nausea, bloating, abdominal discomfort

Up to 10–20%

Reaction to sedation (e.g. drowsiness, nausea)

1–5 in 100

Breathing problems during sedation

1 in 2,000–5,000

Heart rhythm disturbance

<1 in 10,000

Death related to sedation

Extremely rare (<1 in 50,000)

Sources: ANZCA, AIHW, Gastroenterological Society of Australia

Specific Risks of Colonoscopy

Complication

Bleeding (higher if polyps removed)

1 in 100–500

Perforation (tear in the bowel wall)

1 in 1,000–2,500

Post-polypectomy bleeding (delayed)

1 in 100–300

Infection

Very rare (<1 in 10,000)

Missed lesion

Rare but possible

Recovery and Expected Outcomes

- Most patients go home **the same day**
- Mild bloating or cramping is common for several hours
- You must **not drive, work, or make important decisions for 24 hours**
- Normal diet usually resumes the same day unless advised otherwise
- Biopsy results are typically available within **1–2 weeks**

Important Considerations Before the Procedure

- Follow bowel preparation instructions carefully
- Inform your doctor of **all medications**, especially blood thinners and diabetes medications
- Arrange for a responsible adult to take you home
- Inform staff of allergies or prior problems with sedation

Evidence-Based Resources for Patients

1. **Healthdirect Australia**
<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/colonoscopy>
2. **Better Health Channel (Victoria State Government)**
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/colonoscopy>
3. **Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESO)**
<https://www.geso.org.au> (Patient information resources)

Compliance Statement (Internal / Accreditation Use)

This document aligns with:

- **Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) – *Informed Consent Guidelines***
- **Medical Board of Australia (AHPRA) – *Good Medical Practice***
- ***Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC)**

Consent for Colonoscopy

Informed Consent Checklist (RACS / AHPRA Aligned)

Please read and tick each box:

- I understand **why a colonoscopy is recommended** for me
- I understand **what the procedure involves**, including bowel preparation, sedation, biopsies, and possible polyp removal
- I understand the **expected benefits**, including diagnosis and cancer prevention
- I understand the **general and specific risks**, including rare but serious complications
- I understand that **outcomes cannot be guaranteed**
- I understand the **reasonable alternatives**, including no procedure
- I have had the **opportunity to ask questions**, and my questions have been answered
- I have provided **accurate medical information**, including medications and allergies
- I understand the **effects of sedation** and post-procedure restrictions
- I understand that **unexpected findings** may require additional treatment
- I understand that **consent is voluntary** and may be withdrawn at any time

Statement of Consent

I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the information provided
- The procedure, risks, benefits, and alternatives have been explained to me
- I consent to undergo **colonoscopy**

Patient Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Doctor Declaration

I confirm that I have:

- Explained the procedure, risks, benefits, and alternatives
- Answered the patient's questions
- Assessed the patient's capacity to consent

Doctor Name: Dr Suzanne Ma

Signature: _____

Date: _____