

CT COLONOGRAPHY

CT colonography, also known as virtual colonoscopy, uses low dose radiation CT to view the insides of the large intestine, which is otherwise only seen with conventional optical colonoscopy, an invasive procedure where an endoscope is inserted into the rectum and passed through the entire colon.

Colonography is performed to screen for colonic polyps in their early stages, so they can be removed before they develop into cancer. Colorectal cancer, the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths, is preventable in more than 90 percent of cases when polyps are detected early. Despite this, an estimated 80 to 85 percent of people avoid screening partly due to the discomfort associated with conventional optical colonoscopy. CT colonography is a quicker, non-invasive alternative that does not require anesthesia or sedation. Furthermore, it is more comfortable and eliminates associated risks such as bleeding and bowel wall perforation.

The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends screening for colon cancer or polyps beginning at age 50 with screened every 10 years by conventional colonoscopy or every 5 years by CT colonography. Individuals at increased risk or with a family history of colon cancer may start screening at age 40 or younger with shorter screening intervals.

PREPARATION

The preparation involves two days of dietary restrictions and bowel cleansing. Detailed instructions will be provided along with a prescription for the MoviPrep bowel-cleansing system. It is important that you follow and complete all directions carefully to provide the best study results and to avoid having to repeat the procedure.

You should wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing to your exam. You will be given a gown to wear during the procedure. Metal objects including jewelry, eyeglasses, dentures and hairpins may affect the CT images and should be left at home or removed prior to your exam. Any woman who is pregnant, or thinks she might be, should let her doctor know before proceeding with the exam.

THE PROCEDURE

The technologist will bring you to the CT room where the procedure will be explained to you. When comfortably positioned on the cushioned exam table, a thin flexible rectal tube will be inserted into the rectum. During the exam, air will be infused through this tube to expand the folds of the colon. This air may cause mild abdominal discomfort and gas pains. As the imaging process is performed, you will hear a whirring sound as the X-ray tube moves in the machine. The exam table will move through the

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machine as each picture is taken. To obtain the best possible images, it is important that you remain very still during the exam.

The procedure typically requires about 30 minutes.

AFTER THE EXAM

A radiologist, a physician with expertise in interpreting medical imaging, will analyze the CT images and send a signed report to your doctor. Your physician will discuss these results with you and explain what they mean in relation to your health.

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