



Colonoscopy Preparation

Cleansing the colon before a colonoscopy is called a bowel preparation. “Bowel prep is important for colonoscopy as it is designed to remove debris, such as food and stool from the colon. This allows optimal visualization of the colon walls which is where polyps are found.”

“It is very important that you read your bowel prep instructions the day you receive them in the mail. There are certain foods, such as those that contain seeds or nuts, which need to be stopped several days before the procedure.”

There are multiple forms of bowel prep available to be prescribed by your physician. Generally bowel preps fall into one of two categories, a large volume bowel prep or small volume bowel prep. “Large-volume bowel preps are usually reserved for people with constipation or with income limitations as they tend to be cheaper. Small volume bowel preps limit the fluid intake for the prep itself, but still require you to drink a large amount of water or other clear liquid to help them cleanse your colon. Small volume preps generally do not work as well for patients with significant constipation and cannot be used for patients with kidney disease.” At one time there was also a pill form of bowel prep; however, “The pill formulation of bowel prep was discontinued due to kidney damage caused by the medication.”

There have been a few notable changes in bowel preps over the past decade or so. One of the most important changes is split dose prepping. This involves taking half of the prep the evening before the procedure, usually around 6 pm and the other half in the morning 6 hours prior to the procedure. “Split dose prepping has been shown to help with both optimal cleansing of the bowel as well as patient tolerance as the amount of fluid consumed in one sitting is less.”

Taking a bowel prep can be difficult. However, Dr. Rose has a few TIPS that he usually gives to patients to help with tolerating bowel prep:

- 1: Make the bowel prep solution cold as possible, this makes it more palatable
- 2: Use a straw. Place the straw towards the back of your mouth. By doing this you bypass some of your taste buds.
- 3: Ask your medical provider or pharmacist if you can mix any flavoring with your prep, some bowel preps allow you to use flavoring packets to improve the taste.

If you are having difficulty tolerating your bowel prep the best thing to do is to call the number on the instruction sheet. This will get you in contact with a medical provider. “The medical provider can work with you to create a custom plan to help ensure an optimal bowel cleanse for your procedure.”

For colonoscopy, it is very important to complete the bowel prep. “If you come in for the procedure and are not fully cleaned out it is possible that we may need to reschedule the procedure for another day. This would likely require an additional full bowel preparation.” Optimal bowel preparation is extremely important. Poor or sub-optimal bowel preparation increases the risk that polyps, colon cancers, or other colon abnormalities may be missed.

It is also very important to stick to the diet schedule on your preparation instructions and recommendations outlined in the bowel prep packet. “Following these instructions helps to ensure the colon will be thoroughly cleansed with the bowel prep. Eating food the day before the procedure results in solids debris in the colon. Solid debris in the colon makes it more difficult for the bowel prep to do its job.”

Patients also wonder why they cannot have water the day of their procedure. “Liquids are limited the day of the procedure to minimize the risk of anesthesia, or sedation, which is provided during the procedure. One of the risks associated with anesthesia is aspiration, or the reflux of stomach contents up the esophagus and into the lungs. Aspiration can be severe and even life threatening. By limiting fluids during the hours prior to your procedure we try to minimize the amount of contents in your stomach and therefore reduce the risk of aspiration during your procedure.”

