

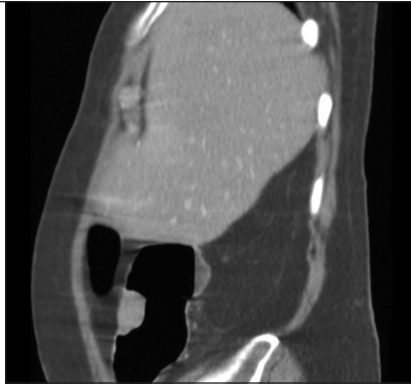


## Virtual Colonoscopy

# Frequently Asked Questions About CT Colonography

**From the  
American  
College of  
Gastroenterology**  
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**CT colonography**

### *What is CT colonography?*

CT colonography or virtual colonoscopy is an x-ray test designed to look for colon polyps and cancers.

### *What happens during a CT colonography?*

First, a radiology technician inserts a tube into your rectum and air is pumped into the colon until it is fully distended. Then you are asked to hold your breath while lying on your back and a CT scan is performed. You then turn over onto your stomach and again hold your breath while a second CT scan of the abdomen and pelvis is performed.

### *Does it require bowel cleansing (laxatives)?*

Yes. The bowel-cleansing regimen is the same as that for a regular colonoscopy. On the day before the procedure, you stay on clear liquids all day and on the evening before and the morning of the procedure, laxatives are taken to flush waste from the colon.

### *Is CT colonography painful?*

Because no sedation is used, the distention of the colon with air can be painful. In several studies, patients experienced more pain and discomfort with CT colonography than with a regular colonoscopy, because the latter involves the administration of sedatives.

### *What happens after the test?*

It is best if you wait in the radiology suite until the radiologist has read the study. That way, if a polyp is detected that would require colonoscopy, you may be able to have the colonoscopy performed and the polyp removed on the same day, without having to repeat the bowel preparation.

### *Is CT colonography an accurate test?*

One recent study using special methodology found that CT colonography was able to detect colon polyps as well as regular colonoscopy. This result has not yet been verified in other studies. Previous studies of CT colonography had shown a very wide range of results. On average, previous results showed that CT colonography was clearly inferior to regular colonoscopy for detection of colon polyps, with many false negatives and false positives.

### *How often is a colonoscopy needed to remove polyps?*

At least 30%, and in some studies, 50% of patients having a CT colonography will need a regular colonoscopy to remove detected polyps.

### *Is it paid for by insurance?*

CT colonography is not covered by Medicare or private insurers at this time.

### *How often should CT colonography be repeated?*

No one knows the answer to this question. In order to be cost-effective, it should be performed no more often than the interval recommended for regular colonoscopy, which is every 10 years.

### *Are there risks to CT colonography?*

The risk of perforation or making a hole in the colon from CT colonography is probably very low. One risk that has not been fully evaluated is radiation exposure. The effect of radiation will be difficult to estimate until the intervals for performing CT colonography are determined.