

Colon & Rectal Surgeons

Colonoscopy - Risks and Benefits

As with any procedure, there are risks and benefits associated with a colonoscopy. Before obtaining your consent for the procedure, your doctor wants you to know about the potential risks and benefits.

- The most obvious benefit for a colonoscopy is that it can prevent colon cancer. Polyps that may become cancerous can be removed during this procedure, and thus prevent them from becoming an active cancer.
- The procedure has a few potential side effects. The most common side effects are cramping pain and abdominal swelling caused by the air used to inflate the colon during the procedure. This air is expelled shortly after the procedure, and these symptoms go away.
- If a biopsy or polypectomy is performed during the procedure, you may note small amounts of blood with bowel movements after the examination. This may last for a few days. Because the lining of the colon has no nerve endings, the biopsy itself is not painful.
- Though very rare, there is potential for the colonoscope to injure the intestinal wall, causing perforation, infection or bleeding.
- There is a small risk that a polyp or abnormality that exists in the colon may go undetected during the colonoscopy. Factors that can affect this include the completeness of your bowel preparation before the procedure, and your anatomy. Carefully following preparation instructions can assist in providing a good exam.
- When this test is performed, you will be given sedating medications to keep you comfortable during the test. Whenever medication is given, a risk of an allergic reaction or side effect of the medication itself is present. These IV medications are given under careful medical supervision, and you will be monitored during the entire procedure to lessen the risk of medication-related complications. Be sure you have advised your doctor's staff of any medical allergies of which you are aware. You will also be advised not to make any important decisions or to drive for a period of time following the exam.