

Having a flexible sigmoidoscopy

Information and advice for patients

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

What is a flexible sigmoidoscopy?

A flexible sigmoidoscopy is an examination of the lining of the left side of the large bowel (colon). It involves a sigmoidoscope (a thin, flexible tube with a bright light on the end) being passed through your back passage (rectum) and into your bowel. It allows samples of tissue (a biopsy) to be taken, the removal of small warty growths (polyps) and the examination of previous polyp sites.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

The benefit of a flexible sigmoidoscopy is that it can help to diagnose the cause of your problems and rule out other conditions.

What are the risks of the procedure?

- Bloating and abdominal discomfort are not unusual for a few hours.
- Removing a polyp can sometimes cause bleeding, although this is usually stopped during the procedure. Occasionally bleeding may occur after you have gone home and, even more rarely, could result in needing a blood transfusion or even less commonly, surgery. Bleeding after a polyp has been removed occurs in 3 – 60 out of 1000 patients.
- There is a risk of making a small tear (perforation) to your bowel. This occurs in 1 – 6 out of 1000 patients.
- Like all tests, there is a risk the procedure will not show up all abnormalities and, on very rare occasions, a significant abnormality may not be identified.
- In a small proportion of patients it is not possible to examine enough of the lower bowel and you may require a repeat flexible sigmoidoscopy.
- If you have any questions about the risks of this procedure please ask your bowel cancer screening nurse.

What are the alternatives to this procedure?

There are no alternatives to this procedure that will allow us to directly examine previous polyp sites.

What are the risks of not having the procedure?

If you do not have this test, we may not be able to detect an abnormality that would require further treatment. If you wish to discuss what it would mean to decline this test please speak to your screening nurse.

Having a flexible sigmoidoscopy

Information and advice for patients

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

What do I need to do before I attend for a flexible sigmoidoscopy?

If you are unable to attend your appointment for any reason, please let us know as soon as possible so that your appointment can be offered to somebody else.

Bowel preparation

To allow a clear view of your bowel it must be empty of faeces (poo). You will be given either an enema or bowel preparation to take for this. If you are advised that you will be having an enema you may eat and drink as normal before the test. If you have been given bowel preparation please follow the instructions carefully. If you have any questions please contact your screening nurse.

Medication

If you take diabetic tablets, insulin, warfarin or clopidogrel/plavix please tell your screening nurse as you will need additional instructions.

Please stop taking all iron tablets 7 days before your appointment.

You may continue to take your other usual medication. Please bring any medication you are currently taking (including sprays and inhalers) with you to your appointment, and details of any allergies or reactions to medicines in the past.

What happens when I arrive at the hospital?

Your appointment will last for 2 – 4 hours. When you arrive please report to the reception desk where a receptionist will check your details and direct you to the waiting area. Please do not bring any valuables or jewellery to the hospital.

Your screening nurse will then explain the procedure to you, to make sure you understand the benefits and possible risks as detailed in this leaflet. The staff will want you to be as relaxed as possible for the test and will not mind answering questions. Provided you are happy for the procedure to be performed, the screening nurse will ask you to sign the consent form to confirm you understand the procedure.

What happens during the test?

The flexible sigmoidoscopy will take place in a private room with only you, the person doing the test and nurses present. You will be asked to change into a hospital gown for the test. The test takes about 10 minutes, but may take longer if a polyp is removed.

The procedure

1. In the examination room you will be made comfortable on the couch and will be asked to lie on your left side.

Having a flexible sigmoidoscopy

Information and advice for patients

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

2. Your back passage will be examined using a finger before the sigmoidoscope is inserted.
3. When the sigmoidoscope is inserted, air is passed into the bowel to inflate it, which helps to give a clearer view. This may give you a bloated feeling and some tummy pain which should not last too long. You may also feel the sensation of wanting to go to the toilet, but as your bowel will be empty this is unlikely. You may pass wind and although this may be embarrassing for you, staff understand what is causing the wind.
4. You may be asked to change position to your back or other side during the procedure.
5. If a polyp needs to be removed or a biopsy taken, this is performed through the colonoscope and is not painful. The base of the polyp is usually cauterised (burnt) to reduce the risk of bleeding.

What happens after the test?

After the test you may need to stay in the unit to rest for up to 1 hour, as each person can react differently to sedation. You will be given fluids and may be given something to eat before you are discharged.

Going home

Before you go home the wind pains and bloating should have settled. It is important that you tell the nurse if they have not, or if they are becoming worse.

When you arrive home it is important to rest quietly for the remainder of the day.

When will I get the results?

Your screening nurse will explain the test results to you before you are discharged. If a biopsy or polyp has been removed, this will be sent to the laboratory for testing and you will be told the results of this within 7 days. You may also be given a written report of the procedure and instructions as to what to do if you have any problems following the test. If you need one, you will be given a clinic appointment to see the screening nurse to discuss your results.

How to contact us

Bowel cancer screening nurse

City Hospital 0121 507 6002

Sandwell Hospital 0121 507 3185

Queen Elizabeth Hospital 0121 204 1648

If you are unable to keep your appointment please telephone one of the above numbers as soon as possible so the appointment can be given to another patient.

Having a flexible sigmoidoscopy

Information and advice for patients

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme, publication no.4 'Evidence summary: Patient information for the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme', November 2008
- British Society of Gastroenterology, 'Guidelines on complications of gastrointestinal endoscopy', 2006

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



A Teaching Trust of The University of Birmingham
Incorporating City, Sandwell and Rowley Regis Hospitals
© Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

ML3988
Issue Date: December 2012
Review Date: December 2014