

CANCER INFORMATION.

Colonoscopy – after a positive Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)

If you have participated in the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) and your faecal occult blood test (FOBT) has come back with a positive result, you will be advised to visit your GP to seek further advice.

A positive FOBT result means blood has been detected in your sample, which happens for about one in 12 people who do the test. Bleeding may be caused by a number of conditions, including polyps, haemorrhoids, or inflammation, and may not necessarily be cancer-related. However, any bleeding needs to be investigated, and you should contact your doctor to discuss the results if your test is positive.

Your GP will advise you on whether you need further investigations or important follow-up tests for your positive FOBT, such as a colonoscopy. If you need to have a colonoscopy, your GP will explain the procedure and tell you about any risks, and will refer you to a colorectal surgeon or a gastroenterologist for this procedure.

What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is a test that allows a specialist to examine the inside of the bowel. It examines the whole length of the large bowel. For most people, this is the best and most accurate test to examine the large bowel for polyps or bowel cancer.

How long does it take?

A colonoscopy takes about 30 minutes and is usually done in a hospital or day clinic. You will need to have someone take you home after the colonoscopy, as you may feel drowsy or weak. Some hospitals will not allow you to leave, unless a friend or family member can pick you up and stay with you at home, after your test.

Do I have to do any preparation?

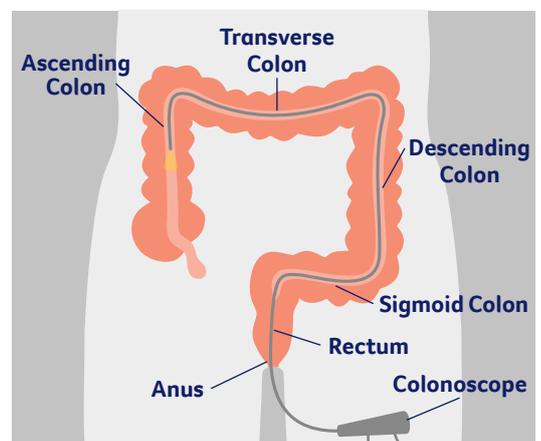
Yes, in the days before a colonoscopy, there will be some dietary restrictions. This generally occurs the day before the colonoscopy. You will be required to drink a special liquid preparation to help empty the bowel. You may also be prescribed a strong laxative to take 12-18 hours before the test.

Each hospital/clinic will advise you of their preparation requirements. It is important to follow the instructions you are given so that you do not need to repeat the test.

What is actually involved?

On the day of the procedure, you will probably be given an anaesthetic so you do not feel any discomfort or pain. This will also make you drowsy and may put you to sleep during the examination.

The specialist will ask you to lay on your left side before inserting a narrow, flexible tube, with a camera on the end, into your back passage (anus). This tube is called a colonoscope, and it will pass from your anus up into your rectum and colon. It allows the specialist to look for polyps or bowel cancers. Most polyps can be removed during the colonoscopy. Air will be pumped into your colon, and the specialist will look for abnormal tissue (such as polyps), which will be removed for further examination (biopsy).



Are there any side effects?

The main side effect of a colonoscopy is temporary flatulence and wind pain, which is due to air pumped into the large bowel during the test. More serious but rare complications include damage to the bowel or bleeding. Your doctor will talk to you about the risks. Overall, the test is safe and the benefits far outweigh the risks for most people.

How much does a colonoscopy cost?

The costs will vary depending on whether you have the colonoscopy as a public or private patient. Public hospital patients are not charged. The cost for private patients will depend on their level of private health cover, and any additional fees charged.

How long will I have to wait for a colonoscopy?

Public hospital patients often have to wait several weeks or sometimes months for the procedure. Remind your doctor to note on your referral that you are a NBCSP participant with a positive FOBT – this way you may be given priority. Private patients usually have a shorter wait.

The Ambulatory Surgery Initiative (ASI) has been developed to shorten the waiting list in Western Australia. This is a bulk billed service for eligible patients. For further information and a list of participating specialists visit gp.health.wa.gov.au/asi/home/.