

# Bowel Preparation Guide: Do It Right, Do It Once

## Before The Preparation

### Why is bowel preparation so important?

A thorough bowel cleansing is critical for a successful colonoscopy. Without an excellent preparation, doctors are less likely to find polyps or important lesions, the exam takes longer, is more dangerous and provides less cancer prevention benefit. If your preparation is inadequate, your doctor will likely recommend repeating the exam sooner than normally required. Do it right the first time.

### What happens if my preparation isn't good enough?

Your physician may ask you to take more preparation solution or reschedule your exam. You might need to repeat the procedure sooner than typically recommended (within 1 year or 5 years instead of 10 years). No one wants additional colonoscopies. Do your best with the first preparation.

### Why must I wake up so early for the second dose?

Taking a second dose of preparation close to examination time significantly improves results. The time between your last dose and the procedure is called "runway time." Overnight, your digestive system produces bile, mucus and bacteria that create a sticky film on the colon lining, which can hide even large polyps. For the best quality examination, follow the two-dose schedule.

### Is this the best preparation method available?

Our providers carefully review all available preparation options based on scientific literature and your individual health needs. We recognize that different patients have different challenges with preparation. If you have concerns, we can schedule a one-on-one consultation, though insurance typically doesn't cover this visit.

## During The Preparation

### I've finished drinking the preparation solution but haven't had a bowel movement. Is something wrong?

Everyone's digestive tract works at different speeds. Most people experience the first bowel movement within 2-4 hours after drinking the preparation solution. If you're constipated or have had bowel surgery, it may take longer. Many medications also affect transit time. Don't worry if your results vary from what's expected.

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## **I feel bloated and nauseated. How can I finish the preparation?**

Some discomfort during bowel preparation is normal. Try these tips:

- Drink the solution cold.
- Use a straw.
- Try menthol lozenges.
- Walk around.
- Slow down or take a brief break.

If you've tried everything and still can't complete the preparation, call the endoscopy unit as early as possible on the day of your exam for further instructions.

## **Why can't I have red liquids or anything to drink for several hours before the exam?**

Red dyes can be mistaken for blood during the examination. Having an empty stomach is crucial for safe sedation. While you're sedated, stomach contents can flow backward into the lungs (aspiration), which can be dangerous. Most experts recommend avoiding all liquids for at least 2 hours before sedation. Follow your personalized preparation instructions.

## **Why should I avoid alcohol during preparation?**

Alcoholic beverages can contain sugars that produce methane gas in the bowel, potentially causing dangerous complications. Additionally, diarrhea and dehydration may cause dizziness, which alcohol can worsen, increasing fall risk.

## **Why must I stop herbal supplements and fish oil?**

Many herbal products interfere with blood clotting and medication metabolism, potentially causing bleeding complications. Since herbal products aren't FDA-regulated, ingredients and dosages may be inconsistent. For safety, stop all herbal products five days before your exam.

Fish oil can coat the colonoscope lens and internal components, requiring specialized cleaning. You must avoid all fish oil supplements for five full days before your procedure or reschedule your appointment.

## **Diet Questions**

### **What is a low-residue diet?**

A low-residue diet limits high-fiber foods, allowing undigested residue to clear from your system before the procedure. This helps your gastroenterologist see inside your colon better. Your preparation instructions may include specific guidance on following a low-residue diet. If you need a complete list of permitted foods, call our office at (541) 768-7838.

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## **Why don't I need to follow a low-residue diet for several days before the procedure?**

Recent evidence doesn't support extended low-residue diet modification. Our physicians regularly update protocols based on current research. Your specific instructions may recommend a low-residue diet for a portion of the day before your procedure or a clear liquid diet for the entire day. Please follow your personalized instructions.

## **Why must I avoid certain sugar-containing liquids?**

Some sugars (mannitol, sorbitol) can pass through the digestive tract unabsorbed. Bacteria in the colon ferment these sugars, producing hydrogen or methane gas. When combined with electrocautery often used during colonoscopy, these gases can cause potentially life-threatening explosions. For your safety, avoid "sugar-free" products sweetened with sorbitol or mannitol.

## **What protein options can I have on a clear liquid diet?**

You can consume clear liquid protein supplements like Ensure Clear until 3-6 hours before your exam. Follow your personalized preparation instructions for the specific time to stop drinking all liquids.

## **Colonoscopy Information**

### **Why is colonoscopy performed?**

Colonoscopy directly examines the colon lining to detect conditions like cancer, inflammation and diverticular disease. It can investigate unexplained symptoms like diarrhea, bleeding and anemia, or evaluate abnormalities seen on other imaging tests.

### **Is colonoscopy painful?**

Most colonoscopies are performed with intravenous sedation, making the procedure very comfortable. Most patients have no memory of the examination afterward.

### **What happens during a colonoscopy?**

After reviewing your medical history and obtaining consent, medical staff will connect you to monitoring equipment and start an IV for sedation. You'll lie on your left side while the doctor slowly advances the colonoscope through your colon. Air or water may be used to improve visibility. The scope reaches from the rectum to where the large intestine joins the small intestine. The doctor removes any polyps found and takes biopsies of abnormal tissue. The procedure typically takes 20-60 minutes, though you should plan to be at the facility for 2-3 hours total.

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## Why are polyps removed during colonoscopy?

Polyp removal (polypectomy) is essential for colon cancer prevention. While most polyps are harmless, some can become cancerous over time. By removing polyps before they develop into cancer, colonoscopy makes colon cancer one of the most preventable cancers.

## What happens after colonoscopy?

Your doctor will explain the results, though biopsy results take longer. If you received sedation, you'll need someone to drive you home. You may experience temporary cramping or bloating until you pass gas. You can usually eat soon after the procedure, though your doctor may restrict your diet and activities if a procedure like polyp removal was performed.

## What are the possible complications?

Though rare when performed by experienced specialists, complications can include:

- Medication reactions (usually treatable).
- Intestinal perforation (may require surgery).
- Bleeding (typically stops without treatment or is controlled during the procedure).

## When should I seek help after a colonoscopy?

Contact your doctor within two weeks after your colonoscopy if you experience:

- Abdominal pain.
- Left-shoulder pain.
- Dizziness.
- Fever or chills.
- Blood in your stool.

## Are there alternatives to colonoscopy?

While alternatives exist (barium enema, CT colonography, fecal DNA testing), colonoscopy is the only approach that both diagnoses and prevents colon cancer by removing polyps. Most abnormal results from alternative tests require follow-up colonoscopy. The best screening test is the one you're willing to complete.

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## Special Situations

### What pain medications can I take around my procedure time?

Continue taking prescribed daily pain medications. If you take pain medications only occasionally and can avoid them for five days before your procedure, that's preferable. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) up to 2,000 mg daily is safe to use.

### When is my stool clear enough?

Your stool should look like urine. It should be transparent enough to see the bottom of the toilet bowl. Yellow, green or orange tints are normal, but brown indicates insufficient preparation. If you've completed the preparation as instructed and your stool is still brown, contact the endoscopy center immediately for further instructions.

### What if my pharmacist's instructions differ from yours?

Follow our instructions. As colonoscopy specialists, we provide preparation guidance based on extensive experience. Contact our office with any questions.

### I have an ileostomy or colostomy. What should I do?

Your preparation will need customization based on your specific anatomy and the purpose of the examination. Contact our office several days before starting your preparation to ensure all questions are answered.

### What if my blood sugar drops too low?

You can drink clear fluids until two hours before your procedure. Options include:

- Clear soft drinks like Sprite or 7UP.
- Apple juice or other fructose-containing beverages.
- A spoonful of sugar dissolved in water.
- Dissolving glucose tablets (available at most pharmacies).

### How should I manage my diabetes during preparation?

The goal is avoiding dangerously low blood sugar (below 70), which can be life-threatening. Temporary high blood sugar (under 300) during preparation isn't harmful. Call your doctor if your blood sugar exceeds 350. Follow the medication adjustments we've recommended during your preparation period.

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