

The Ins and Outs of a Colonoscopy

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Congratulations. You're 50 years young. I'm sure there are a number of to-dos now that you reached this important milestone. Perhaps you are beginning to think about your retirement plans. Maybe even that car you always dreamed of. Of course, there are other considerations when you turn 50 that are just as important as planning for retirement. Your health is chief among them. And since 50 is the new 30 (I just made that up since I am approaching 55), don't you want to live life to the fullest? If the answer is yes, then make sure you do all you can to prevent your health from getting in the way of that goal. When asked about life events upon turning 50, one of the more frequent responses will most probably be getting a colonoscopy. Ninety percent of colon cancer cases occur over the age of 50, thus the reason that your big 5-0 accompanies unpleasant thoughts of this important procedure.¹

In the United States, an estimated 145,600 adults will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Additionally, it is estimated that 51,020 deaths (54%/46% men to women) will be attributed to it in 2019.²

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. for men and women combined.

So when I turned 50, I knew it was time to get checked. Considering my mother had a high rate of developing polyps there was even more reason to make sure I followed through.

Scheduling the colonoscopy was important. I wanted to limit the impact on work and so I made sure I set my appointment well in advance to ensure it was an early Friday morning. However, when that time came, I was going to be traveling and therefore needed to reschedule. Again, I opted for a future Friday date several months later. And when that time arrived, I didn't realize that my daily regimen of medication which included baby aspirin needed to be stopped a week earlier to my procedure. It seems there are risk factors involved with different medications. For instance, blood thinners cause a higher risk of bleeding, and since there is a [low] risk of breaching an organ's wall, your doctor may advise discontinuing them.

Some medications simply cannot be discontinued, so many facilities will not perform the procedure unless there are multiple checkpoints along the way. It turns out that pamphlet of information they give you on your pre-visit is important to read. I would have needed to obtain proper guidance from my doctor, and one day prior to the procedure was not ample time. I needed to reschedule yet again.

The third time was the charm. With my medication in order and, as luck would have it, a cancellation on a Friday morning, I was set to go through with my procedure. The prior day's prep certainly is not pleasant, however, it has improved over much over the years. Not only do you need to drink fewer liquids, but you also do not have to dedicate as much time to your cleansing. This has made it much more comfortable and convenient for patients. It is important that your

colon is clean in order for the procedure to properly identify any polyps, the precursor to cancer.

3 STEPS FOR A GOOD COLONOSCOPY PREP

- 1. Cut out fiber.** Two days before your exam, you'll switch to a low-fiber diet. Fiber residue can clog the scope and is not easy to remove by colonoscopy.
- 2. Switch to clear liquids.** One day before the exam, you'll drink only clear liquids. "You need a lot of clear liquids to stay optimally hydrated and help flush the prep through the intestinal tract," Dr. Burke says.
- 3. Start the prep.** The national (and international) standard for high-quality bowel cleansing is a split-dose regimen, where you take half the prep the night before and the other half four hours before the procedure. If you have an afternoon exam, you can drink the whole prep the morning of the procedure. "We have learned that having fewer hours between finishing the prep and starting the colonoscopy is the optimal cleansing strategy," says Dr. Burke.

[Source: Carol Burke, MD for Cleveland Clinic](#)

I, like most, was sedated and under anesthesia during the entire procedure. Upon waking I felt drowsy, but not uncomfortable. I was relieved that no polyps were found. So after a few minutes, I was able to be driven home to relax and of course, consider the many foods I've been craving for the past few days. Since my digestive tract is now clear, health and wellness blogger, and my colleague Dina Beck, tells me this was the perfect time to line my gut with helpful flora through intake of probiotics through fermented foods (preferred) or probiotic supplements. Pass the kimchi, please.

You should also know that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires both private insurers and Medicare to

cover the costs of colorectal cancer screenings. According to the law, there should be no out-of-pocket costs for patients, such as co-pays or deductibles. Of course, you should always check with your insurance prior to scheduling your screening to be sure there are no exceptions. All in all, this procedure is not as complicated as people think. The biggest obstacle may be your own planning and timidity for the prep. Talk to your doctor. Do your research. And know that this screening is an important part of ensuring you live a long and healthy life. So what are you waiting for? If you're 50 and have not yet had a colonoscopy, get it scheduled.

¹[Harvard University](#), "Harvard Health Publishing"

²[American Society of Clinical Oncology](#), "Cancer.Net"

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