

FLEXIBLE SIGMOIDOSCOPY – PATIENT INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

What is a flexible sigmoidoscopy and how is it performed?

Flexible sigmoidoscopy is a procedure to inspect the lower part of the colon (large bowel) using a thin, flexible, tube introduced via the rectum (back passage). An intravenous sedative is given prior to the procedure so that you will be sleepy and comfortable during the examination. The entire procedure usually takes between 10 and 20 minutes. Biopsies (small tissue samples) may be taken and polyps (small growths attached to the lining of the bowel) may be removed.

Instructions for Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

Please notify Qld Specialist Physicians if you are pregnant, diabetic, take Warfarin, suffer from disease affecting the heart valves, or have a pacemaker.

An empty stomach is essential for a safe examination, so **you should have nothing to eat or drink for six hours before the examination**. You may have your normal medications with a small sip of water.

After you are admitted to the Day Hospital, a nurse will administer a small liquid enema into the rectum. This is not painful but will result in stimulating a bowel motion so that the lower part of the bowel is clean for the examination. A laxative bowel preparation drink is not required.

What happens after the flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Following the flexible sigmoidoscopy, you will remain in the hospital recovery area until the effect of the medication wears off. You may experience slight discomfort or bloating which usually eases with the passage of wind. If you have a biopsy or polyp removed, you may notice a small amount of blood passed in the toilet. If you develop severe or persistent abdominal pain, bleeding from the back passage or any other symptoms of concern, you should contact your doctor, Dr Gaffney, or go to the nearest hospital's Emergency Department. Because the sedation given may interfere with your judgement or ability to concentrate, you should not drive a motor vehicle, travel on public transport alone, operate dangerous machinery or sign important documents for the rest of the day. **You should arrange for a relative or friend to take you home.**

What are the risks of flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Any medical procedure carries some risk but flexible sigmoidoscopy is generally considered a safe procedure and complications are rare. Potential complications may include:

- Reaction to the sedation / anaesthetic
- Bowel perforation (estimated risk is approximately 1 in 1000).
- Major bleeding (estimated risk is 1 in 3300 for biopsies; 1 in 500 for removal of polyps).

Although rare, perforation or major bleeding can be serious and may require urgent surgery. If you wish to have a more detailed discussion about potential risks, please contact Qld Specialist Physicians prior to the procedure (Tel: 4646 3237).

What are the limitations of flexible sigmoidoscopy?

Only the lower part of the colon is examined with a flexible sigmoidoscopy. The examination may be further limited by variations in the structure of the bowel, pathology within the bowel or because of inadequate bowel preparation. Therefore, a small proportion of polyps, cancers or other pathologies may escape detection. A CT scan of the colon may be recommended to complete the examination.