

Colonoscopy Bowel Prep—Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This FAQ is compiled from actual questions asked by patients and caregivers. If there is contradictory information between these instructions and those you may find on the bowel prep container or other informational handouts, please use and follow this handout.

1. Can you review the diet instructions? When am I allowed to eat before my colonoscopy?

All patients undergoing colonoscopy must remain on a clear liquid diet for the entire day BEFORE their procedure. This means absolutely no solid food for breakfast, lunch or dinner the entire day before but Jell-o and other clear liquids (i.e., Coffee without milk/creamer, soda (non-red), tea, clear broth, sports drinks etc.) are all ok. Eating solid food the day before the procedure increases chances of an inadequate bowel prep which may require repeating the procedure.

2. Why is having a good bowel prep so important? Can't you just "clean me out" during the procedure?

While liquid remnants can often be successfully suctioned through the scope during a colonoscopy, even tiny solid debris may clog the scope or prevent the physician from adequately visualizing the walls of the colon. As a result, this increases the likelihood that polyps or masses are missed and often means repeating a colonoscopy much sooner than would normally be recommended.

3. I had a colonoscopy 10 years ago and at that time my bowel prep was different. Why does the new instructions recommend "splitting up" the bowel prep?

Medicine is always changing and evolving based on the new evidence available. There is now significant data which suggests that splitting the bowel prep (i.e. half taken at 5 p.m. the day before the procedure and the remainder taken six hours before the procedure) improves the quality of the cleanse and makes it easier for the patient (i.e., minimizes nausea, vomiting, bloating, cramping etc.).

4. Can I drive myself to and from my procedure?

No. All patients undergoing anesthesia for any GI procedure must have a driver that is over the age of 18 that can pick them up after the procedure. Taxi/Uber/bus transportation is not permitted for medical/legal reasons.

5. Do I have to miss work for my procedure?

Patients will have to miss work only on the day of their procedure. The day prior to the procedure, patients are still able to work since the bowel prep doesn't start until 5 p.m. The day following the procedure patients can return to work like normal. Unfortunately, since you will receive sedation the day of the procedure you can not go back to work the same day.

6. Do I have to finish the entire bowel prep container? What do I do if I get nauseous or vomit?

Yes, it is very important to finish the entire bowel prep container. Even if your stools appear clear before you are done with the entire container, often the right side of the colon still has residual solid debris that will require more bowel prep to adequately clean out.

Nausea is very common during the prep and can be remedied by taking a short break from drinking the prep or drinking the prep more slowly. Please call our Telenurse at any time if you have ongoing issues with your prep.

7. I lost my bowel prep instructions, what do I do?

Please call our Telenurse line (217-528-7541) to ask a clinical question after business hours as we have nursing staff available to help 24 hours a day. The general rule for a "split-dose" prep is to drink half the prep starting at 5 p.m. the day before the procedure and then the remainder half of the prep taken six hours before the procedure. You need to avoid drinking for at least four hours prior to your procedure to safely receive anesthesia.

