



# Understanding Bowel Preparation Before Colonoscopy

IMPROVING DIGESTIVE  
HEALTH THROUGH  
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ENDOSCOPY



## Understanding Bowel Preparation Before Colonoscopy

It is extremely important that your colon be thoroughly cleaned before your colonoscopy. This will let the doctor see any abnormalities, such as colon polyps, during the procedure. Polyps are small growths in the colon that could later turn into cancer.

Cleansing the colon before a colonoscopy is called bowel preparation, or "prep." It involves taking medication that causes diarrhea, which empties the colon. The medication is taken by mouth, and comes in liquid, powder to be mixed with water or tablet form.

**In order for the colonoscopy procedure to be accurate and complete, the colon must be completely clean. Your doctor will tell you to change your diet at least one day before your colonoscopy.**



## What bowel (colon) preparation steps are involved before a colonoscopy?

Your doctor will prescribe the type of bowel prep that is best for you. You will receive specific instructions on how to take your prep. Carefully follow all the steps your doctor prescribes. In general, you can expect to do the following:

- Limit your diet to clear liquids for at least one day before your colonoscopy. Clear liquids include broth, tea or coffee (no milk or creamer), gelatin desserts, soda, sorbet, popsicles, and clear fruit juices (without pulp) such as apple juice. Avoid gelatin desserts or liquids that are red or purple in color.
- Your doctor will tell you exactly when to stop eating and drinking before your colonoscopy.
- Some preps are split dose. This means that you would take some of the prep the day before your colonoscopy and the rest of the prep on the day of your colonoscopy. Or, your doctor may ask you to take the entire prep the day

before your colonoscopy. Your doctor will decide which prep is best for you.

- It is important to avoid dehydration during bowel prep. Drink more fluids than you usually do.

## Can I continue to take my current medications?

Tell your doctor what medications you're taking, especially aspirin products, arthritis medications, blood thinners (such as warfarin, clopidogrel and dabigatran, which are available under the brand names of Coumadin®, Plavix® and Pradaxa®), blood pressure medications, insulin or iron products. Most medications can be continued while you take your prep, but some can interfere with either the prep or the colonoscopy. Your doctor will decide which medications to continue or stop.

## Why is bowel prep important?

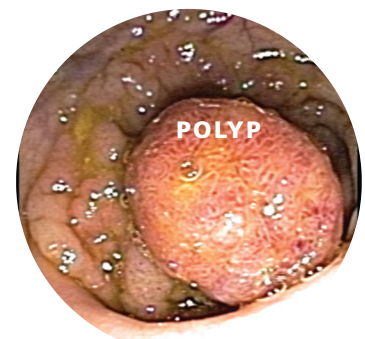
Your bowel must be clean so that your doctor can thoroughly examine your colon. It is important that you try your best to fully complete the prep.

## What are the types of bowel prep?

Several types of bowel prep medications are available and are listed to the right. Your physician may recommend one of these or another available prep. You will need to carefully follow your doctor's instructions about the exact dose and timing of your prep. Some bowel preps are covered by your medical insurance. You should consider asking your insurance company if any available preps would require you to pay out-of-pocket costs.

## What determines the type of prep I get?

Your medical history and current condition are the most important factors in deciding which type of bowel prep is best for you. Tell your doctor if you have any medication allergies or have ever had difficulty with taking a bowel prep in the past. Let the doctor also know if you are pregnant or breast feeding or have ever had high blood pressure, heart, kidney or liver disease, or a previous bowel obstruction. Your doctor might also consider your individual preferences (taste and amount of medication) and out-of-pocket costs when choosing your prep.



**Polyps are benign growths within the lining of the colon. Most colon cancers develop from colon polyps over a period of several years. Removing colon polyps reduces the risk for colon cancer.**

## What if I forget to take the medication when I should or remember too late to finish the prep?

Call your doctor if you are unable to complete the bowel prep. You should also call the doctor if you experience vomiting, severe abdominal pain or if there is visible brown stool after completing the bowel prep as instructed.

## What are the common side effects of bowel prep?

The type and severity of side effects differ among patients and with the prep used. Some patients have nausea, vomiting, bloating (swelling in the abdomen) or abdominal pain. In rare cases, certain preps can cause kidney injury, worsen heart failure or cause seizures. Your doctor will explain the possible side effects of the prep selected for you.

### Helpful hints

#### Helpful hints

Some people have found these tips helpful for taking the prep:

- refrigerate the prep prior to drinking it
- drink it with a straw
- suck on a lemon wedge before drinking it
- plan ahead—think about the time it will take to travel to your appointment when deciding when to start and finish your prep

**Important Reminder:** This information is intended only to provide general guidance. It does not provide definitive medical advice. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

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### Bowel Prep Medications

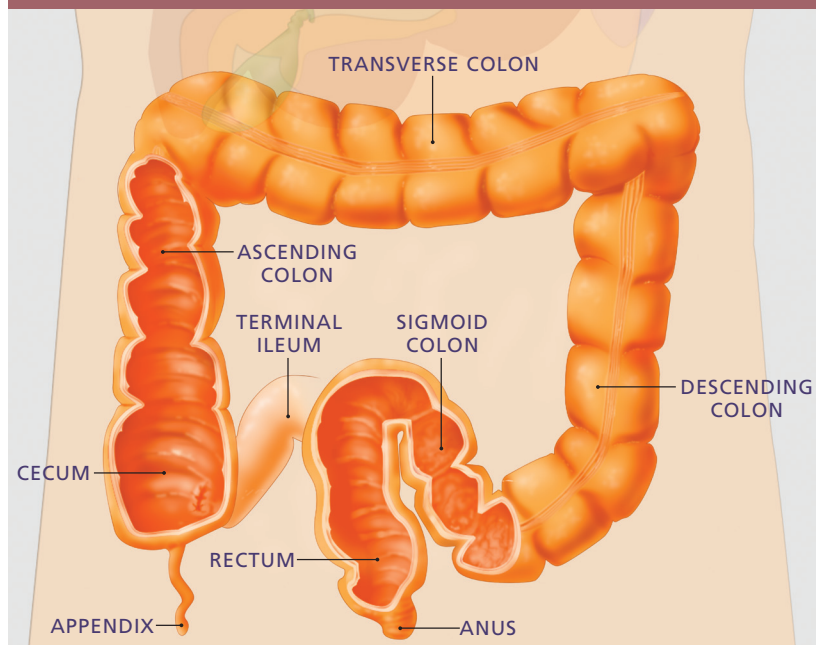
**Polyethylene glycol (PEG) electrolytes lavage solution** comes as a powder to be mixed with water before use. PEG-based products are often preferred for patients with kidney, heart and liver conditions because they do not cause mineral or fluid changes that can lead to dehydration. PEG products are available as full volume (4 liters) or low volume (2 liters) preps.

**Phosphate-based preps** come in liquid or tablet form. Sodium phosphate can cause mineral or fluid changes in the body. Because of these changes, it is not recommended in the elderly, patients with kidney disease, high blood pressure or heart failure, or in patients taking certain blood pressure or arthritis medications. In rare cases, sodium phosphate can cause kidney injury.

**Sulfate-based prep** is an osmotic laxative indicated for cleansing of the colon as a preparation for colonoscopy. It is available in liquid form.

**It is important that you consult your doctor about your specific situation.**

Cleaning your colon thoroughly before your colonoscopy allows the doctor to see abnormalities, such as colon polyps, during the procedure. Cleansing the colon involves taking medication that causes diarrhea, emptying the colon.



Since its founding in 1941, ASGE has been dedicated to advancing patient care and digestive health by promoting excellence in gastrointestinal endoscopy. This information is the opinion of and provided by the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.

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