

COLONOSCOPY RISK INFORMATION

What are the alternatives to colonoscopy?

1. Barium enema

This involves an x-ray of the large bowel. It does have fewer risks than colonoscopy, but biopsies are unable to be taken and polyps cannot be removed. It also does not examine the rectum or lowest part of the bowel very accurately. You are conscious and aware of the procedure.

2. Virtual colonoscopy

A CT scan of the abdomen enables a three dimensional image of the colon to be taken. This is not in routine use and does not enable biopsies to be taken or polyps removed.

** both alternatives still require bowel preparation**

What are the Risks of Colonoscopy?

1. Incomplete colonoscopy

On occasions, the colonoscope is unable to be passed through the entire colon. This occurs in up to 10% of cases depending upon your age and whether you have had previous pelvic or abdominal surgery. If this occurs, you will have your colon examined again, either by repeat colonoscopy, virtual colonoscopy or barium enema as soon as possible.

2. Missed lesions

No medical test can be 100% accurate. Colonoscopies miss lesions in the bowel in up to 8% of cases. This is more likely for small lesions than for serious lesions such as cancer. For this reason, it is recommended that patients over the age of 50, and those with a family history of colorectal cancer perform a "faecal occult blood" test in years between colonoscopies.

3. Perforation of the colon

A perforation is when a hole or tear is made in the colon by the colonoscope. This occurs in 1/500 to 1/1000 cases. If it occurs, an operation to repair the perforation is usually required. This involves a stay in hospital of at least 1 week.

4. Bleeding from the bowel

Small amounts of blood are not uncommon after biopsies or removal of polyps. In 1/100 cases of polypectomy the bleeding may be severe and require blood transfusion.

Read this information, in conjunction the discussion with your doctor at consultation. Your anaesthetist will discuss risks related to their treatment.