This leaflet tells you about CT Colonography. This is a test to look inside your abdomen and bowel for any abnormality. It explains how the test is done, the risks involved and what to expect.

What is CT Colonography?

This is also known as CT Colonoscopy or Virtual Colonoscopy. It involves using a CT scanner to produce images of the whole of the large bowel (colon and rectum). ‘CT’ stands for Computed Tomography, which is a way of using X-rays to give detailed images of the body.

During a CT Colonography, air will be used to inflate the bowel through a thin flexible tube which is placed in your back passage.

CT scans are then performed with you lying on your back and then on your front. In this way, we can then look at the images to see if you have bowel disease such as polyps or signs of cancer.

Are there alternatives to CT Colonography?

There are two other ways of looking at the large bowel they are a barium enema and endoscopy.

Barium enema is a more unpleasant and less accurate test. We no longer offer this test at North Bristol NHS Trust.

Endoscopy of the large bowel is also called Colonoscopy. An endoscope is a tube with a camera on the end which is passed into the back passage and moved up and around the bowel.
It is more invasive than CT Colonography and usually requires sedation. However, it does allow biopsy or removal of small polyps.

**Are there any risks?**

CT Colonography is generally regarded as a very safe test. It is safer than endoscopy and problems rarely occur.

Problems that could occur include:

- Abdominal discomfort and bloating.
- Feeling faint.
- Damage to the bowel wall.

(A small tear in the lining of the bowel occurs rarely, in fewer than 1 in 2000 tests).

This damage is usually minor and may not produce any symptoms.
What do I have to do before my CT Colonography?

To give us a clear view of the bowel lining, your bowel has to be carefully prepared over the two days before the test.

It involves two things:

1. Drinking an iodine-containing liquid called ‘Gastrografin’. This is a laxative. In most people the effect is mild to moderate. It is rare to get severe diarrhoea. You will be given a leaflet explaining this preparation in more detail.

2. You must also eat a low residue diet for two days. Please see the separate diet sheet. This tells you what to eat and what not to eat. We ask people to have only clear fluids on the day of the scan.

You should continue to take all your usual tablets. When you arrive in the department please let us know if you have had Angina or a heart attack in the last year.
What happens during CT Colonography?

- The radiographer will explain the test and answer any questions you may have. Please let them know if you have had any problems with your bowel preparation.
- The procedure will then usually take about 15-20 minutes.
- You will be asked to lie down on the scanner table on your side.
- The radiographer will pass a short, thin flexible tube into your back passage.
- A bowel muscle relaxant (Buscopan) may be injected into a vein in your arm to prevent bowel spasm.
- Air will be gently introduced into your bowel through the tube in your back passage.
- You may still feel some bloating and mild discomfort in your abdomen like ‘bad wind’.
- Once the radiographer is satisfied with the amount of air in your large bowel two scans will be taken with you lying on your back.
- You will then be asked to turn on to your front for two more scans.
- You may also be asked to turn onto your side for scans if the previous scans have not shown the whole length of the bowel.
What happens after the procedure?

- The radiographer will remove the tube and assist you to the toilet where you can pass some of the air in private.
- We will make you a hot drink to help you feel more comfortable.
- When you are ready, you may dress and leave the department.
- You will probably feel ‘windy’ for the remainder of the day but this should ease gradually.
- You should return to your normal diet immediately following the test.
- Your results will be sent back to the doctor who requested the test. This usually takes between 7 and 10 days.

If you have any questions?

Please do not hesitate to ask questions either before or after your scan. Contact details can be found on your appointment letter.
References


If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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