Prairie Mountain Health

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy Patient Information

What is a Flexible Sigmoidoscopy?

A flexible sigmoidoscopy is a test that uses a long, flexible tube with a camera on the end (an endoscope) to look inside part of your lower digestive tract. This includes your anus, rectum, and the lowest part of your large intestine (sigmoid colon). It is quicker than a colonoscopy, which looks at your entire large intestine. The camera images are shown on a video screen for the doctor (endoscopist) to see.

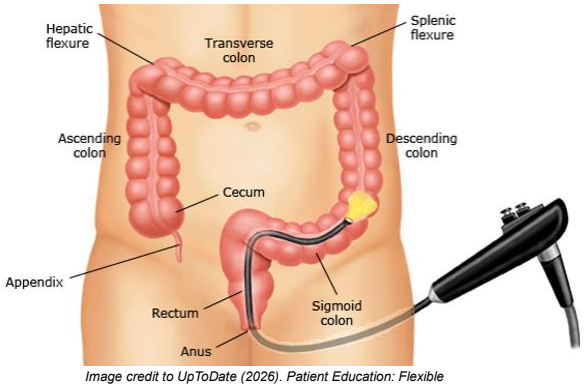

Image credit to UpToDate (2026). Patient Education: Flexible Sigmoidoscopy (Beyond the Basics)

The test usually takes 10 to 20 minutes to complete, but it may take longer depending on what the doctor finds or if any treatments are done. Complications are rare, but possible risks include bleeding, infection, reactions to the medications used, or injury to the digestive tract.

What to Expect Before Your Test

You will be given diet and medication instructions to follow before your test, and laxative instructions to empty your body of stool (poop). This is usually done by giving yourself an enema at home, or by having one at the hospital right before your test. An enema is a liquid medication inserted directly into your rectum that helps make you poop. If you don't think you will be able to do this on your own, contact the office of your healthcare provider or the office of the endoscopist doing your test for options.

When you arrive at the facility where you are having your test, report to the registration desk. After registering, you will be directed to a waiting area until a member of the healthcare team is available to get you ready.

When it is your turn, you will change into a hospital gown and your vital signs will be checked. You will be asked about your medical history and how you prepared for the test. You may be asked to sign a consent form if you did not sign one before the appointment. If you are receiving intravenous (IV) sedation, an IV line will be placed in your arm.

What to Expect During and After Your Test

You will be taken to a procedure room when it is time for your test. Vital sign monitors will be put on and you may be given oxygen to breathe. If you are receiving sedation, it will be given before the test starts. The doctor will then gently guide the endoscope into your anus, rectum, and colon to do the sigmoidoscopy. It is normal to feel some slight bloating and pressure while this happens. Sometimes small pieces of tissue (a biopsy) or growths (polyps) are removed for testing, but this is usually quick and should not cause pain. The doctor may also do other treatments depending on why you are having the test.

When your test is finished, you will be moved to a recovery area for monitoring. If you had sedation, you may need to recover in the hospital for up to an hour before going home. If you did not have sedation, you may be able to leave sooner. Your recovery time can also be different depending on the treatments done and how you feel afterward.

You will be given written instructions that explain any important findings or samples taken, and if you need to follow up with a healthcare provider. If samples were taken, the results will be ready in a few weeks.

Information credit to Shared Health Provincial Endoscopy Services (2026). Information About Your Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

PRAIRIE MOUNTAIN HEALTH

Original Effective Date: 2024-Nov-27
Revised Effective Date: 2026-Apr-15
Form #: PMH3838

Important Information About Your Visit

- You will get an appointment letter, email or phone call with the date, time, and location of your test. Follow the directions to confirm or change the appointment so that your test is not delayed or cancelled.
- You may need to start changing your diet or medications up to 7 days before your appointment. Look over the instructions right away so you are prepared in time.
- You can buy an enema from a pharmacy, where it may be kept behind the counter. A prescription is not needed to buy it, but if you would like a prescription for insurance coverage you will need to contact your healthcare provider.
- Plan to be at the hospital for at least 2 hours. However, delays from other hospital emergencies can cause a longer wait than expected.
- Bring your Health Card, a list of your medications, and the phone number of your support person and/or transportation with you to the hospital.
- Keep your hearing aids, glasses, and/or dentures in.
- If you use an inhaler (like Ventolin), bring it with you.
- If you check your blood sugar at home, consider bringing your blood glucose meter and glucose monitoring supplies (such as test strips, a low-blood-glucose treatment, and a snack) with you.
- Do not bring valuables such as jewelry or cash, and do not wear scented products, nail polish, or fake nails.

Important Information About Sedating Medications

Most people having a flexible sigmoidoscopy **are not given intravenous (IV) sedation**, which are medicines given into your veins to relax you and make you sleepy. However, if the doctor has recommended you have sedation, it is important to understand that it can impair your memory, decision-making ability, and balance for **24 hours or longer**. These effects tend to impact older adults more strongly, which can increase the risk of falls or injuries after the procedure. **For your own safety:**

- Do not drive, drink alcohol, use cannabis or sleeping pills, make important decisions, sign legal papers, or use machinery or power tools after your test.
- A responsible adult must drive you home from the hospital. If you are taking public transportation or a ride service, someone should go with you.
- Someone must stay with you after your test, including overnight if the doctor recommends it. This is especially important if you live alone or are a caregiver to others, as you may need help with activities such as walking, getting dressed or preparing meals.
- Have your ride and support person arranged before your appointment, or your test may be delayed or cancelled.
- You should be able to return to your usual activities the day after your test, but if you are still feeling tired or unsteady you should stay home and rest an extra day.

If you do not receive sedation, you may drive yourself home and return to normal activities immediately after your test.

If you have any questions about your upcoming procedure, contact the facility listed on your appointment letter or ask your healthcare provider. You can also call Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 for 24/7 health information and advice.