



The Difference Between Virtual and Conventional Colonoscopy

Virtual Colonoscopy

- Virtual colonoscopies are minimally invasive. No long tube inserted rectally.
- Requires no sedation. You can go back to work immediately after the test.
- Colon is gently inflated with CO₂ rather than air and an invasive tube. The CO₂ is rapidly absorbed and expelled via the lungs so the patient does not have the distention and pain seen with a conventional colonoscopy.
- Images are captured with a high-speed MDCT scanner.
- Images of the colon are reconstructed allowing physicians a 2D and a 3D review from all angles.
- In addition to locating polyps inside the colon, wall thickening and abnormalities outside the colon may be detected.
- Virtual colonoscopies are faster, taking 30 minutes from start to completion.

Conventional Colonoscopy

- Conventional colonoscopies require a long flexible tube to be passed from the rectum through the entire length of the colon while the physician views the interior lining of the colon.
- The procedure is normally performed in a surgical suite and requires sedation. Because sedation or anesthesia is required, the patient must have someone drive them to and from the procedure.
- Normally, this procedure requires talking the entire day off.
- Costs for a conventional colonoscopy are generally **two times greater** than a virtual colonoscopy due to the added expense of sedation and a surgical suite.
- While infrequent, there are several risks associated with perforation of the colon during conventional procedures.

Colorectal Carcinoma Is the Third Most Common Cause of Cancer-Related Death

With approximately 150,000 new cases diagnosed and 60,000 deaths per year, colorectal cancer is the third most common cause of cancer-related death in the United States. A virtual colonoscopy is less invasive and more comfortable for patients—especially older ones. Because there is no sedation and no specialized surgical suites required, costs are lower and require less time from a patient's day.

Who Should Have a Virtual Colonoscopy?

- Men over 50
- Women over 55
- Anyone with a history of colon resection
- Patients with inflammatory/ulcerative mucosal disease of the colon
- Patients on anticoagulant therapy

Why Should You Have a Virtual Colonoscopy?

- Colon cancer is the #3 cause of death in the United States
- Colon cancer is almost always curable with early detection
- Virtually risk free, no sedation needed, and you can return to work the same day



Frequently Asked Questions about Virtual Colonoscopy

Do I have to have a bowel prep for virtual colonoscopy?

Yes, a cleansing bowel prep is necessary. Solid waste material must be purged from the colon before the exam as this material interferes with the ability to identify small polyps.

Will my insurance pay for virtual colonoscopy?

Since this test is new, insurance coverage is quite variable. If your doctor orders these tests for diagnostic purposes and not for screening, then many insurance companies will pay for this exam. To assist your physician, we have prepared a sample letter that your physician can utilize to request benefits for you. Medicare provides coverage for a VC if the exam is part of a diagnostic workup where a conventional colonoscopy is contraindicated. If you have a FLEX plan through your employer, you can use your FLEX benefit to pay for your virtual colonoscopy.

How much radiation is involved with virtual colonoscopy?

A virtual colonoscopy done on an Multi-detector CT scanner exposes you to only about 2000 mrem of radiation. This is approximately 5 times what you would receive in annual background radiation from natural causes, but much lower than the limit of the maximal annual dose of 5,000 mrem/yr recommended by the Health Physics Society.

What if a polyp or tumor is found on the virtual colonoscopy?

If a polyp or tumor is found, a colonoscopy will be required for biopsy or removal of the growth.

I am on blood thinners. Will I have to stop them before the virtual colonoscopy?

No. Since Virtual Colonoscopy is non-invasive, blood thinners are not a problem, as they are with conventional flexible colonoscopy.

Is virtual colonoscopy safe? Is there any risk of colon perforation?

Virtual colonoscopy is very safe. There is no risk of the colon perforation that is seen occasionally with conventional flexible colonoscopy.

Will I need someone to drive me to and from the virtual colonoscopy?

No. Virtual colonoscopy does not require any sedation, pain medications, oral or IV medications. Normally, you can return to work and/or normal activities immediately after your virtual colonoscopy.

Is virtual colonoscopy painful?

Patients describe virtual colonoscopy as very tolerable. Some patients report an occasional mild cramping (but not painful) when the colon is being filled with CO₂. The CT scan can be completed in one or two breath holds and then the rectal tip is removed and the air is expelled or absorbed.

Is virtual colonoscopy as reliable as conventional colonoscopy?

Virtual colonoscopy has been shown to be as good as conventional colonoscopy in detecting clinically significant polyps and cancers in head to head trials. In fact, in some studies, virtual colonoscopy beat conventional colonoscopy in polyp detection because more of the colon was visualized. Conventional colonoscopy fails to visualize the entire colon in 10 to 20% of cases because the operator will be unable advance the scope to the end of the colon for technical reasons.



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