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CT (“Virtual”) COLONOGRAPHY

1. What is it?

CT colonography is a screening test for colon cancer and potentially cancerous growths (polyps). CT colonography uses X-rays and computer software reconstructions of the colon rather than a camera to look inside your body. This has advantages over optical colonoscopy in that it can “see” behind the folds of the colon, the preparation is less stressful for most individuals, though it must be adequate to cleanse the colon of fecal material for an accurate evaluation of the colon and most people can return to their normal activities after the examination. Sedation is not required. This examination, like all other examinations, is not always 100% accurate. The results for detection of colon growths, which could be cancerous are equally as accurate as those of optical colonoscopy.

2. How is CT colonography done?

During the test, the following will happen:

- a. For the day prior to your CT scan, you will follow a bowel-cleansing regimen. On this diet, you will drink only clear liquids (i.e., water, tea, juice, soda, broth, Jell-O, etc.). You will not eat any solid foods. In addition, you will take medications to clean your bowel as well as ingest a small amount of liquid, which will help identify any residual stool.
- b. On the day of the CT scan, you will lie on a narrow bed in the CT scanner. A small tube will be placed into your rectum and gas (CO₂) will be introduced into your colon to distend it. You will have a sensation of fullness.
- c. The CT scanner will then make several passes over you while you are lying on your back and on your stomach. During the CT scan, you must hold your breath for about 20 seconds each time the scanner passes over your abdomen.
- d. The whole CT scan procedure requires about 15 minutes.

3. Is there a lot of radiation?

The amount of radiation you will be exposed to from the CT scan is relatively small. This dose of radiation could be potentially harmful, but the risk is so small that it cannot be measured. If you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant, you should not have this study.

4. Who reads it?

A diagnostic radiologist will read your CT colonography study. Results are usually available to your doctor within 7 days.

5. Why would you do this instead of a conventional colonoscopy?

CT colonography may be performed when conventional colonoscopy is not able to study the entire colon, when there is a concern that conventional colonoscopy may be too risky for a patient, or when the patient prefers to have a CT rather than conventional colonoscopy screening examination.

6. How accurate is a CT colonography?

CT colonography is a very good way to find colon cancer and larger polyps, which are growths in the colon that might later become cancer. Research continues to be performed, but to this point the accuracy of CT colonography is similar to that of conventional colonography for findings of larger polyps and colon cancer.