

Virtual Colonography (CT Colonography):

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL COLONOGRAPHY?

Virtual colonography (CT Colonography) is an advanced and highly accurate screening method used to detect small polyps or other growths inside your bowel. Polyps that grow on the inside lining of the bowel sometimes turn into cancers. Quicker and less invasive than conventional colonoscopy, this technique uses a 60 second CT scan of the abdomen, along with 3D reconstructed images, to view the inside of the bowel. Because of its non-invasive nature, it is not possible to take tissue samples or remove polyps during the procedure. If evidence of polyps is found on the scan, you will be referred for a conventional colonoscopy.

REASONS FOR THE PROCEDURE

The reason for virtual colonography is to find bowel cancer at an early stage when it can be treated most successfully. Conventional colonoscopy is also used to screen for bowel cancer. This procedure is done by placing a long, flexible, lighted scope and tiny camera into the bowel so that the doctor can look at it directly and remove any polyps that are present.

Virtual colonography has several advantages over conventional colonoscopy:

- It is less uncomfortable and invasive than conventional colonoscopy and usually does not require any pain medication or anaesthesia.
- Virtual colonography takes less time and poses less risk of puncturing the large intestine.
- It may be used in people who have problems such as swelling, bleeding, or breathing difficulties and who may not be able to tolerate conventional colonoscopy.
- It may be able to show areas of the large intestine that conventional colonoscopy can't reach.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

Before having a virtual colonography, the bowel needs to be free of everything solid so that the CT images will be clear. This involves having a liquid diet and taking laxatives for up to two days before the scan. Detailed preparation will be provided when you make your appointment.

DURING THE PROCEDURE

- A thin tube will be placed into your rectum to inflate your bowel with air so that polyps or other growths are more easily seen. You may feel a slight fullness.
- You will lie on your back on a table that slides into the CT scanner.
- The table will move slowly through the scanner as the images are taken.
- You will be asked to hold your breath at times during the scan.
- A second series of images is taken with you lying prone.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

In most cases you should be able to return home without assistance and resume your normal diet and activities.

RISKS OF THE PROCEDURE

- Because polyps or suspicious growths cannot be removed or biopsied during virtual colonography, you may still need to have a conventional colonoscopy if polyps or other suspicious areas are detected.
- Virtual colonography can miss some polyps if they are smaller than 10 mm, although some of these might be detectable by conventional colonoscopy.
- Virtual colonography uses x-rays to create images of the bowel and rectum although the radiation received during the scan is small.
- If you are pregnant or may be pregnant, you should talk to your doctor before booking an appointment.