

Getting Ready for Your Virtual Colonoscopy (VC) VC PEG (GoLYTELY®) Prep with Oral Contrast

Virtual colonoscopy (VC), also called CT colonography, is a safe, less-invasive type of colonoscopy. It uses a CT scan to create a 3D picture of the inside of your colon so the doctor can look without using a scope. A VC shows the whole lining of the colon to help check for polyps (growths) and cancer in the large intestine (colon and rectum). Screening should start at age 45, or your doctor may recommend you start screening earlier if you have a family history of colorectal cancer.

If a large polyp or growth is found, you may need a standard colonoscopy to remove it. Large polyps are 1 cm (about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch) or bigger. They are removed because they have a higher chance of turning into cancer. Fewer than 1 in 20 patients have a growth this size.

Doctors can also watch small polyps over time. Small polyps, 6 mm to 9 mm (about $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$ inch), can be safely watched with a follow-up VC in 3 years. You can also choose to have them removed by standard colonoscopy the same day or later.

VC also lets the doctor take a limited look outside the colon for problems in the abdomen and pelvis. This may help find issues such as abdominal aneurysms, other cancers, or conditions you may not know about. We may also be able to do a CT bone mineral density (BMD) exam to screen for osteoporosis. We will schedule this during your VC exam with no extra scans or cost.

Medicines

You can take most prescribed medicines before the VC exam. Read below for medicines that may need to be stopped. If you have any questions or concerns about stopping the medicine, call your doctor.

Iron, Multivitamins with Iron and Fish Oil

If you want a same-day standard colonoscopy if a polyp is found, stop iron tablets, multi-vitamins with iron and fish oil **5 days before the exam**. If you cannot have a same-day colonoscopy because you do not have a driver, take blood thinners, or have other plans, you may keep taking these medicines. They do not affect VC.

Blood Thinners or Anti-Platelet Medicines

Do not stop taking these unless your doctor tells you to. You can have a VC exam while taking blood thinners or anti-platelet medicines. VC is often advised for patients taking these medicines because it may be safer than stopping them for a standard colonoscopy. If a polyp needs removal, we will consult your doctor to plan a later colonoscopy.

If your doctor tells you to stop these medicines for the option of a same-day standard colonoscopy, ask how long to stop and follow their directions.

Fiber Supplements

Four days before the test, stop taking any fiber supplements like:

- Metamucil®
- Benefiber®
- Citrucel®

Anti Diarrhea Medicine

Three days before the test, avoid anti-diarrhea medicines. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions.

Diabetes and Weight Loss Medicines

You must call the doctor who prescribes this medicine to adjust your medicine before your test. That doctor will tell you how to safely do this.

Conditions

Diabetes

Test your blood sugar more often the day before the test and the morning of the test. Adjust your insulin or diabetes pills as your doctor told you. If your blood sugar is low (less than 70 mg/dl) or you have symptoms, take glucose tablets or drink 4 ounces of a clear liquid with sugar. Check your blood sugar again to make sure it stays above 70.

We can still do the exam unless you need solid food to keep your blood sugar normal. It is more important to keep your blood sugar normal than to have the exam. We can always reschedule your VC.

If your blood sugar gets too high or too low and you can't fix it, call your primary care or diabetes doctor.

Diverticulitis

If you get diverticulitis before your VC, call your doctor first. Then reschedule the VC exam for at least 4 weeks after treatment.

Pregnancy

Do not start the prep kit if you may be pregnant. Call the VC office. We will order a pregnancy test before you start the prep.

Diet

4 Days Before

Avoid foods that digest slowly (corn, popcorn, potato skins, nuts, fruits with skin or seeds, raw vegetables, beans, granola, high-fiber cereals).

1 Day Before

Starting at midnight the day **before** your exam, drink **only** clear liquids. If you need to limit fluids, GoLYTELY[®] does not count toward your fluid limit. **Avoid** solid foods and red or purple liquids (i.e., red Jell-O[®], cranberry juice, purple sports drinks). You may have:

- Sports drinks with electrolytes:
 - Gatorade[®]
 - Powerade[®]
- Water
- Hot or iced tea
- Coffee with no cream or milk (sugar or honey is okay)
- Vitamin water[®]
- Crystal Light[®]
- Jell-O[®] or Popsicles[®] (**no** fruit or cream added)
- Bouillon or broth (chicken, beef, or vegetable)
- Fruit juice (**no** orange, tomato, grapefruit, or prune juice):
 - Apple
 - White cranberry
 - White grape juice
- Soda:
 - Sprite[®]
 - 7-Up[®]
 - Ginger ale
 - Mountain Dew[®]
 - Colas
- Clear hard candy or gum
- Lemonade (with **no** pulp)
- Clear liquid protein drinks
 - Ensure Clear[™],
 - Resource[®] Breeze

Bowel Prep

You will need a clean bowel for the best exam. You will start your prep the day before your exam. The prep kit has:

- Laxatives:
 - GoLYTELY®
 - Bisacodyl®
- Contrast medicines:
 - Omnipaque (iohexol)
 - Barium sulfate
- Instructions

The laxative cleans out your bowel. The contrast medicine helps show any stool or fluid left in your colon on the VC pictures.

Storage

You may store GoLYTELY® and barium sulfate at room temperature or in the fridge. It may taste better if it is chilled (do not add ice.) **Do not** put the Omnipaque (iohexol) in the fridge and do not store the bottle where it would be in direct sunlight. Do not add ice.

Bowel Prep Tips

Staying Warm

You are drinking a large amount of liquid quickly, so you may feel cold. This is normal. To stay warm, wear warm clothing, use a blanket warmed in the dryer, or drink it at room temperature.

Soreness

For a sore bottom, use baby wipes and apply A+D® or Vaseline®. TUCKS® medicated cooling pads may also help.

Medicine

Do not take other medicines while drinking GoLYTELY®. Take them at least one hour before you start or one hour after you finish.

How to Prepare GoLYTELY® Solution

1. Read the directions on the GoLYTELY® bottle.
2. Add water to the “fill” mark on the bottle.
3. Shake well until all the powder is dissolved.
4. Do not add ice or other liquids.
5. You may drink GoLYTELY® without flavoring. If you want flavor, you may:
 - a. Add two packets of Crystal Light® yellow lemonade powder with Nutrasweet® to the whole bottle, OR
 - b. Flavor each glass separately.
 - c. Drink with a straw to lessen the taste.
 - d. Try gum or clear hard candy between glasses.

Day Before Exam: Bowel Prep Instructions

Step 1 – At 8 AM or earlier: Take four Bisacodyl® tablets (5 mg each) with one glass (8 ounces) of clear liquid. Do not chew or crush them. Do not take them within one hour of an antacid. These tablets help move your bowels, so GoLYTELY® works better. You can keep doing normal activities, but the tablets may cause diarrhea in some people.

Step 2 – Between 12 PM and 2 PM: Start drinking the GoLYTELY®. Drink one 8-ounce glass every 10 minutes. If you feel sick to your stomach, stop until the nausea passes. Then start again at a slower pace—one glass every 15 to 20 minutes. Try to finish and be cleaned out by about 6 PM.

About one hour after you start, you will likely have diarrhea. Stay near the bathroom. Cramping in your lower belly is normal. If

you have severe/steady pain, feel dizzy, or do not pass any stool, call your doctor.

Most people have to finish the whole bottle for the best exam. But, if your bowel movements are clear and/or see-through after drinking at least half the bottle, you may stop. If you're not sure, keep drinking your prep.

If You Finish the GoLYTELY® by 6 PM

Step 3 – At 7 PM: Drink the entire 225 mL bottle of barium sulfate suspension from your prep kit. This contrast helps show any leftover stool on the CT images. It does not contain lactose. You may keep drinking clear liquids.

Step 4 – At 8 PM or later: Drink the entire 50 mL bottle of Omnipaque (iohexol) 350 mg/mL. This contrast helps show fluid in your colon. The bottle says it's for injection, but you will drink it.

Remove the top before drinking. The plastic bottle has a pull-tab on the top, but you do not need to pull this. Instead, twist the entire top to remove it. Also remove the black rubber stopper before drinking the contrast. You may mix it with 8 ounces of clear juice, water, or soda, or drink it plain and follow with 8 ounces of liquid. Finish before midnight.

If You Cannot Follow the Schedule

If you still have GoLYTELY® at 6 PM, keep drinking until you are cleaned out. One hour after you finish, drink the barium sulfate. At least one hour after that, drink the Omnipaque.

Day of the Exam

Do not eat or drink after midnight on **the day of your exam**. Take your daily medicines with small sips of water.

During the Exam

The virtual colonoscopy takes about 30 minutes. Allow up to 50 minutes for changing clothes and talking with the CT technologist. You do not need pain medicine, sedation, or an IV. You will change into a gown and lie on the CT table. A small tube is placed a short distance into your rectum. Carbon dioxide is slowly added to your colon. The exam should not be painful, but you may feel fullness, discomfort or cramping. These feelings go away after the exam.

Pictures are taken while you lie on your back and then on your stomach. If you cannot lie on your stomach, pictures can be taken on your side. You will hold your breath for about 10 seconds while the CT scanner takes pictures.

After the Exam

The CT technologist will ask for your phone number. The team will call you with your results in about two hours. Most people return to normal activities after the exam.

If you do not have polyps, you can go back to your normal diet and medicines when we call. If a polyp is found, we will review your options and help set up care. If you need a standard colonoscopy the same day, the VC team can arrange it as long as you have not eaten or had liquids.

If you take prescription blood thinners, anti-platelet medicines, or do not want a same-day colonoscopy, you may return to your normal diet right after the exam.

Driving Home

You do not need to have anyone drive you to and from the VC exam. If you need a standard colonoscopy the same day, you will need to arrange for someone to drive you for that test.

Diet

If you wish to have a polyp removed the same day as your VC, please do not eat or drink until you hear from us.

Results

If other problems are seen outside your colon, the full report is sent to your doctor. If you have UW MyChart, you can view the report when it is final. If you do not have UW MyChart, follow up with your doctor if you have not heard from them in 1–2 weeks.

Resources

To learn more about the virtual colonoscopy exam and prep, please scan the QR code or use the link to see our video.



uwhealth.org/vcprep

Who to Call

VC Program Office
(608) 263-9630

If you have an urgent concern after normal business hours, contact your primary care doctor's on call service. If your referring doctor is from outside the UW Health system, you may call the paging operator for urgent VC concerns at **(608) 263-6400** and ask for the radiology resident on-call.

If you need urgent medical help, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

If you need to reschedule for any reason, call **(608) 263-9729**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6293