

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF A COLONOSCOPY?

1. Intolerance to colonic preparation.

After taking the colonoscopy preparation, patients occasionally get abdominal cramping, nausea or vomiting. Rarely dizziness can occur, even fainting. Very rarely patients can have palpitations or severe imbalance of body salts (electrolytes). In view of this, **a responsible adult must be present in your home during the preparation**, otherwise a hospital preparation may need to be organised beforehand.

2. Reaction to anaesthetic.

1. pain in the arm at the injection site; 2. bruising or infection where the cannula is inserted; 3. nausea and vomiting; 4. altered heart rates; 5. dizziness or fainting; 6. allergic reaction; 7. aspiration of vomit from the stomach into the lungs; 8. Heart attack; 9. stroke and death (extremely rare). If you have any questions please ask the anaesthetist prior to your procedure.

3. Bleeding.

This is very rare following a standard colonoscopy and biopsy. The risk is increased if a polyp is removed. This is approximately 1:1,000; 1-3% if large flat polyps are removed. This may require hospitalisation, IV fluids or a blood transfusion. Rarely is an operation required to control the bleeding. Occasionally a repeat colonoscopy is required urgently to stop the bleeding. Patients on anti-platelet blood thinning medication might need to cease these prior to having their colonoscopy – See medications. If these are continued, then large polyps may not be able to be removed during the procedure.

4. Perforation (hole in the bowel).

With a standard colonoscopy without removal of polyps, the published risks of perforation are approximately 1:3,000 procedures. If there is a perforation, this can present with severe pain following the procedure. This life threatening complication will require a prolonged hospital stay and usually an operation.

5. Acute diverticulitis can be exacerbated.

A colonoscopy should not be performed within 2-6 weeks after an attack of diverticulitis.

6. Colonoscopy with polypectomy reduces the risk of cancer by 60-90%, but there is still a low risk of developing subsequent bowel cancer.

7. Damage to other organs.Very rarely damage can occur to other organs during colonoscopy such as damage to the spleen. This is a rare complication.