



## **WHAT IS IT?**

Sigmoidoscopy, also known as flexible sigmoidoscopy, is an outpatient procedure, usually performed in a doctor's office. Using a lighted, flexible, fiber-optic tube, the doctor can examine the interior of the rectum and lower colon.

## **WHAT CONDITIONS IS IT DESIGNED TO TREAT?**

Sigmoidoscopy is a diagnostic test used to determine the cause of abdominal pain, change in bowel habits, new or persistent constipation, protracted diarrhea, rectal bleeding or blood in the stool, or unexplained weight loss. Sigmoidoscopy is also used as a screening tool for colon cancer, evidence of polyps, Crohn's disease, and other problems. Routine screening is recommended for patients over age 50 and earlier if there is a family history of colon cancer.

## **HOW IS THE PROCEDURE DONE?**

Sigmoidoscopy is performed in a doctor's office. The patient will be asked to use an enema before the procedure to clear the bowel. While lying on the left side, the doctor will first perform a digital exam to check for blockage, then gently insert the endoscope (a long, thin, flexible, fiber-optic tube) into the anus. Air is used to distend the bowel and enable the physician to view the bowel. The endoscope is extended the whole length of the large intestine unless a blockage is encountered. If necessary, instruments can be threaded through the tube to collect biopsy material. The endoscope will be slowly removed from the anus to allow further inspection of the colon. The procedure takes approximately 20 minutes. A mild sedative may be administered to reduce discomfort.

## **ARE THERE OTHER SIMILAR PROCEDURES?**

Colonoscopy is similar but more comprehensive since the whole large intestine is examined.

## **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS?**

Potential risks include bowel perforation, bleeding from biopsy sites, or infection.

## **WHAT ARE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS AFTER THE PROCEDURE?**

Patients can return to normal activities immediately after the procedure. There may be slight discomfort for 30 to 60 minutes afterward as the air used to dilate the colon is expelled. If a biopsy was taken and bleeding is heavy or prolonged, or any sign of infection occurs including fever or chills--a physician should be consulted immediately.

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### **Health Information Provided by Women's Health Specialists**

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