



PATIENT INFORMATION

Surveillance colonoscopy - Information for patients with long-standing IBD

This leaflet explains more about surveillance colonoscopy for patients with long-standing inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is surveillance colonoscopy?

Surveillance colonoscopy is the most important measure for preventing colorectal cancer in patients with IBD. These consist of regular colonoscopies which allow specialists to look for early changes in the colon before cancer develops. Surveillance colonoscopy is performed every one year, three yearly or five yearly, depending on the severity and extent of the IBD and presence of any other risk factors.

Why have I been referred for surveillance colonoscopy?

You have been diagnosed with ulcerative colitis (UC) or Crohn's disease (CD) collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). It is known that patients with IBD have a slightly increased risk of developing colorectal cancer compared with the general population.

What are the benefits of being screened?

The main benefits of screening are detection of changes at a very early stage when they are more likely to be cured.

How does bowel cancer develop?

In most cases there are changes in the bowel lining before a cancer develops which can be detected with biopsy samples. These are precancerous changes named polyps. These polyps can develop abnormal cells (dysplasia). Once polyps or dysplasia occurs they can progress to cancer over a number of years.

What are the risks of developing bowel cancer for patients with IBD?

The risk of developing bowel cancer depends on the extent and duration of IBD. There are also additional risk factors such as family history of bowel cancer, severity of inflammation and presence of a liver disease named primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC).

How can I reduce the risk of bowel cancer?

The risk for developing bowel cancer can be reduced in several ways. Most importantly, you need to take the medication prescribed by your gastroenterologist, as this helps reduce inflammation in the bowel and subsequent cancer risk.

It is also important to see your doctor for regular check-ups at least once a year, even when your IBD is in remission, this ensures that you remain on the most appropriate treatment. If you have any changes in symptoms at any time, it is best to speak to your doctor immediately.

Who can attend / receive the service?

We recommend that all patients with IBD affecting more than one third of the large bowel (colon) should be under the surveillance colonoscopy programme for colorectal cancer. We advise that they should have their first screening colonoscopy 10 years after diagnosis of their disease.

How can I prepare for a colonoscopy?

You will receive information about having a colonoscopy, which explains the procedure and potential risks in detail. Your colon needs to be completely clean for the colonoscopy so that the specialist can get a clear view of the lining of your bowel. It is important that you follow our recommendations for diet prior to the procedure and take the bowel prep as instructed. Tips for making the prep more palatable include refrigerating the prep to drink cold, use a wide bore straw and sucking on a clear boiled sweet straight afterwards.

What are the options if precancerous or cancerous cells are found in my colonoscopy?

If polyps or dysplasia is detected during your colonoscopy we usually try to remove them through an endoscopy procedure to prevent progression to colorectal cancer. In rare cases where endoscopic removal is not possible, we may recommend surgical removal of your large bowel and removal of all the tissue where cancer might develop in the future.

Where can I get further information?

Your doctor and the nurses will explain the procedure in detail when you attend the endoscopy department or at your clinic appointment.

Useful sources of information

Crohn's and Colitis UK

w: www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk

Beating bowel cancer

w: www.beatingbowelcancer.org

Language and accessible support services If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch with the endoscopy department using the contact number on your appointment letter

NHS Choices Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about surveillance colonoscopy, please contact the endoscopy unit on the number on your appointment letter.

Or:

IBD Advice Line

Tel: 01803 655111

Email: ibdtorbay.sdhct@nhs.net