Flexible sigmoidoscopy: Why am I having one? What can I expect?

Why am I having a flexible sigmoidoscopy? How is it performed?
Flexible sigmoidoscopy is often done before some surgeries or to evaluate the causes of symptoms such as diarrhea, bleeding, colitis, changes in bowel habits and changes in stool form or color.

Flexible sigmoidoscopy is a procedure that enables your doctor to examine the lining of the rectum and lower colon (bowel). A lubricated soft, bendable tube about the thickness of the index finger is gently inserted into the anus (rectal opening) and moved into the rectum and the lower part of the colon. A biopsy specimen (tiny bit of tissue) may be taken for microscopic examination.

If polyps or growths are found, the doctor will usually request that you have a colonoscopy, which is a complete endoscopic examination of the entire colon. A colonoscopy is more suitable to remove polyps and enables the doctor to check the remaining colon for any other polyps or lesions.

What can I expect?
Please arrive an hour before your scheduled procedure to allow adequate time for registration and nursing staff to prepare you for the procedure. You will be asked to sign a consent form authorizing the doctor to perform the procedure. The total time from registration until the time you are ready to leave will be about 2 to 2-1/2 hours.

A needle for intravenous (IV) medicines will be placed in your arm vein prior to the procedure. Medicine will be injected through this needle that will make you sleepy and relaxed. Typically, patients experience little or no pain, although a feeling of pressure, bloating or cramping during the colonoscopy may occur because of the air which the doctor puts into the colon. Afterward, you may feel drowsy and sleep for a short time.

Post-procedural results and instructions
After recovery, the doctor goes over the results with you. It may be necessary to call you at home with the results if a biopsy was performed. If you do not hear from us within 7 days, please phone our office for the results.
Before you leave, a surgical nurse or technician provides post-procedural instructions.

Restrictions
During the first 24 hours following your procedure you should avoid:
• Driving or operating motorized vehicles. You will not be permitted to leave alone following your procedure. Please arrange now for a competent adult to accompany you home.
• Drinking alcoholic beverages.
• Making important decisions or signing legal documents.

Side effects
You may continue to feel bloating for up to an hour after your procedure until the air is expelled. You may also notice a small amount of blood with your first bowel movement; however, do not be alarmed.

Potential serious complications
ANESTHESIA: There are very rare complications associated with the sedating medications, which include a slowing of respirations and/or a drop in blood pressure. For these reasons, continuous monitoring of your blood pressure, pulse and oxygen level is necessary during the procedure.

FLEXIBLE SIGMOIDOSCOPY: Serious but uncommon complications include: missed polyps (potentially cancerous growths); bleeding, especially after biopsies or removal of a polyp; and perforation or tear in the colon. Bleeding or perforation/tears would require hospitalization and possible surgery.

Please call our office immediately at 218-724-3411 or go to your nearest hospital emergency room if you experience any of these rare side effects following your procedure: severe abdominal pain, fever, bloody bowel movements, and/or dizziness or weakness.

For more information about the flexible sigmoidoscopy procedure including pictures and diagrams, please visit the Patient Education page of our website at www.northlandgastro.com.