

Endoscopic Procedure - Indications, Types, How It Is Done, Risks, And Complications

(0:00 - 0:18)

An endoscopy is a procedure to visualise internal organs using an endoscope, which is a long thin flexible tube that has a light and camera at one end. Images of internal organs are shown on a television screen. Endoscopy is indicated for investigation of various clinical presentations.

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Some of them include dysphagia or difficulty in swallowing, unexplained abdominal pain and heartburn, vomiting of blood, bleeding per rectum, unintentional weight loss with other gastrointestinal symptoms, unexplained respiratory symptoms, etc. In addition, endoscopy may be used to take biopsies and for the treatment of certain disease conditions. Endoscopes can be put through the oral cavity into the gastrointestinal tract, to the larynx and trachea, or through the anus.

In addition, endoscope can also be inserted through a small cut made in the skin, when laparoscopic surgery is being done. If the oesophagus, stomach, or proximal part of the small intestine is being looked at, it is known as upper GI endoscopy. If the colon is being looked at, it is known as lower GI endoscopy or colonoscopy.

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Other types of endoscopies include bronchoscopy, to visualise the airways, hysteroscopy, to visualise the uterus, cystoscopy, to visualise the bladder, arthroscopy, to visualise and repair joints, and endoscopic ultrasound, to yield images of internal organs such as pancreas and take biopsies. Wireless capsule endoscopy is a newer technique, which involves swallowing a small capsule that has a camera and light in it. Camera sends pictures to a computer and comes out when the person passes stools.

Endoscopies are usually done in hospital. Depending on the indication, patient might be asked to fast for several hours. A laxative may be given to clear the bowel if GI endoscopy is being performed.

Patients are advised to have a low-fibre diet for several days before a colonoscopy. Sometimes, prophylactic antibiotics are given to reduce the risk of infection. If the patients are taking blood-thinning medications, such as warfarin and clopidogrel, they should be stopped several days prior to reduce the risk of bleeding.

Endoscopy is not usually painful. However, it can be a bit uncomfortable to a patient. A local anaesthetic may be given before the endoscopy is performed.

Sometimes, a sedative is indicated to help the patient relax. The whole procedure usually takes about 15 to 45 minutes, depending on the indication. Patients can be discharged after the procedure, and there is no need to stay overnight.

Endoscopy is usually a safe procedure, and the risk of serious complications is very low. Some rare complications include infection, perforation of an organ or bleeding, low blood pressure, and breathing difficulties. In case of wireless capsule endoscopy, it may be difficult to swallow and pass out the capsule.

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It can also get caught in the narrow areas of the bowel, causing a blockage.