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Mayo Clinic Minute: Tips to make colonoscopy bowel prep easier

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For many people, one of the most uncomfortable parts of a colonoscopy is the preparation for the procedure.

The purpose of a colonoscopy is to examine the colon and rectum for abnormalities such as polyps, tumors or inflammation, aiding in the detection and prevention of colorectal cancer. And to do that, it's important your medical team has a clear view.

Dr. Derek Ebner, a Mayo Clinic gastroenterologist, offers tips on how to make colonoscopy bowel prep, essentially a strong laxative, easier.

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Journalists: Broadcast-quality video pkg (1:09) is in the downloads at the end of the post. Please "Courtesy: Mayo Clinic News Network." Read the script.

"The entire spirit of doing the colonoscopy prep is to make sure that there is nothing in the colon," says Dr. Ebner.

That's so your medical team can detect and remove polyps or lesions.

"We frequently hear that the colon preparation can be a challenge," he says.

When to start bowel prep

Review your prep guidelines one to two weeks before your procedure for any special instructions. You may be encouraged to make small changes in your diet starting a week before the procedure.

Often, the day before the colonoscopy is when you'll start the bowel prep solution. Dr. Ebner says this is where people may struggle.

Tips for taking bowel prep solution

"There's a couple of tricks. Often, cooling the solution and drinking it through a straw can be helpful. Others like to have a small lime or lemon wedge that they just bite into after doing some of the solution," says Dr. Ebner.

Chewing gum between sips of the solution also may help. And he says taking the solution is often spread out over two days, and that can help too.



Chew gum between drinks of the bowel prep solution to reduce unpleasant tastes and dryness in the mouth

"Half of the volume is done the day before the procedure, the other half is done the day of the procedure. That helps make it a lot more tolerable. And, in fact, we get a better cleanout by doing that splitting," he says.

Dr. Ebner says some adnominal cramping, bloating, discomfort or nausea during the bowel preparation is normal. "For those that do have nausea, slowing down how fast you're consuming the fluid can oftentimes be really helpful," he says.

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