
Flexible Sigmoidoscopy Fact Sheet

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

What is a flexible sigmoidoscopy?

A **flexible sigmoidoscopy** allows the doctor to look at the inside of the large intestine from the rectum through the last part of the colon, called the sigmoid or descending colon. Your child's doctor may use the procedure to find the cause of diarrhea, abdominal pain, or constipation.

With flexible sigmoidoscopy, the doctor can see

- bleeding
- inflammation
- abnormal growths
- ulcers in the descending colon and rectum

Flexible sigmoidoscopy cannot see polyps or cancer in the ascending or transverse colon (two-thirds of the colon).

For the procedure, your child will

- lie on their left side on the examining table

The doctor will

- insert a short, flexible, lighted tube into the rectum and
- slowly guide it into the colon

The tube is called a **sigmoidoscope**. The scope lets the doctor carefully examine the lining of the colon and the rectum by sending a picture of the organs onto a small video screen. The scope also blows air into these organs, which inflates them and helps the doctor see better.

If anything unusual is in your child's rectum or colon, like a polyp or inflamed tissue, the doctor can remove a piece of it using instruments inserted into the scope. The doctor will send that piece of tissue (**biopsy**) to the lab for testing.

Bleeding and puncture of the colon are possible complications of sigmoidoscopy. These kinds of complications are not common.

Flexible sigmoidoscopy takes about 10 to 20 minutes. During the procedure, your child might feel pressure and slight cramping in the lower abdomen. Your child will feel better after the air leaves the colon.

Preparation

The colon and rectum must be completely empty for flexible sigmoidoscopy to be thorough and safe. Because of this, the doctor will instruct your child to drink only clear liquids for 12 to 24 hours before they come in for their procedure.

A liquid diet means

- fat-free bouillon or broth
- gelatin
- strained fruit juice
- water
- plain tea
- diet soda

Your child's doctor may give you other special instructions to follow.