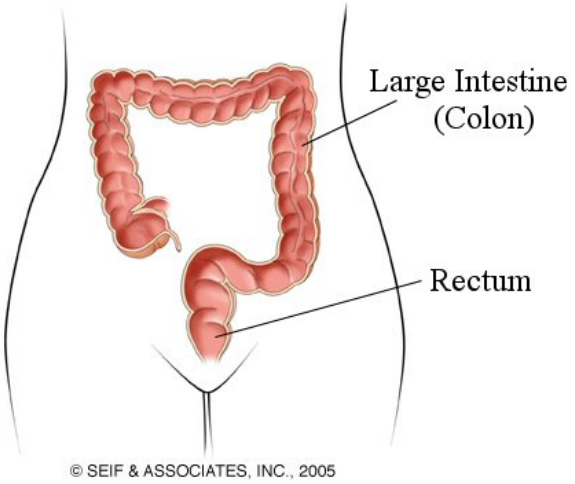
Air Contrast Barium Enema & Preparation

An air contrast barium enema has been ordered for you by your caregiver to evaluate the large intestine (*colon*). This test helps to evaluate the large intestine bowel and rectum. This test is also performed as part of a routine physical exam in later years of life. It is then used to search for abnormal growths (*polyps, tumors*) or other diseases. It differs from a routine barium enema because air is also introduced into the large intestine after barium has been introduced and partially eliminated. Air acts as a contrast agent to give more detailed x-rays. The added detail is sometimes helpful to the specialist who will read the X-rays (*radiologist*). The addition of air to the procedure may help the radiologist to see details not seen with the plain barium enema. It is especially helpful in seeing detail in the lining of the colon. This procedure is also called a double contrast barium enema.



BEFORE YOUR TEST

Follow all instructions for test preparation. A liquid diet may be required for a few days prior to testing. No food is allowed the night before the test. Suppositories, laxatives, or an enema may be required prior to testing. Instructions will be given. Follow instructions carefully. This will clean out your colon and improve the quality of your X-rays. Arrive 1 hour early to check in. An air contrast barium enema takes about 1 hour.

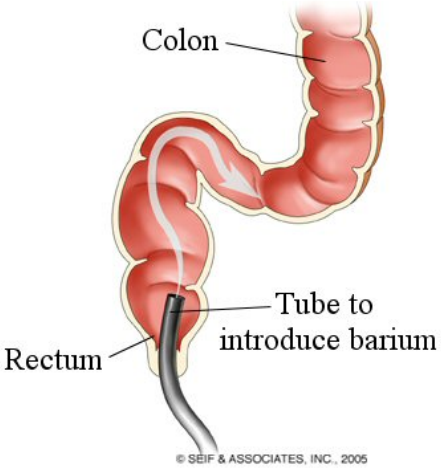
LET YOUR CAREGIVER OR X-RAY TECHNOLOGIST KNOW ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- Allergies.
- Medications taken including herbs, eye drops, over the counter medications, and creams.
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams).
- Previous problems with anesthetics or novocaine.
- Possibility of pregnancy, if this applies.
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*).
- History of bleeding or blood problems.
- Previous surgery.
- Previous or existing colon problems.
- Other health problems.

Let your technologist know if you were unable to complete the preparations for your test or unable to follow the dietary instructions.

DURING YOUR TEST

A small tube is inserted into your rectum. This has a tip on the end with a balloon that can be inflated. The balloon is used to help you retain the barium that is put into your colon prior to the X-rays. You will feel the need to go to the bathroom. However, the balloon will help prevent this while X-rays are being taken. The barium outlines the inside of the colon while X-rays are taken. During your exam you will be told to shift position and hold your breath briefly. Some gentle pressure may be applied to your belly (*abdomen*). All of this is done to obtain better X-rays. Following some initial X-rays you will be allowed to go the bathroom. Air will then be put into the colon through the tube to obtain even more detailed X-rays if necessary. If you develop a strong urge to go to the bathroom, take slow deep breaths to relax. You may leave when the technologist informs you that you are through.



FOR YOUR COMFORT DURING THE TEST

- Relax as much as possible during the test.

- Try to follow your technologist's instructions to speed up the test.

FOLLOWING YOUR TEST

- You may resume normal activities.
- Call your caregiver as instructed.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat enough fruits and vegetables to keep your stools soft. Your stools may appear lighter for a few days following the test.
- For the protection of your privacy, test results can not be given over the phone. Make sure you receive the results of your test. Ask as to how these results are to be obtained if you have not been informed. It is your responsibility to obtain your test results.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You become lightheaded.
- You faint.
- You pass blood from the rectum.
- You develop belly (*abdominal*) pain or a fever.

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