CT: Virtual Colonoscopy

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how a virtual colonoscopy CT works, how to prepare, how it is done, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is a virtual colonoscopy?

A virtual colonoscopy is a computed tomography (CT) scan of the colon. It uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures.

CT can show many types of tissue in the same image. Your doctor will be able to see pictures of your liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys, lower gastrointestinal (digestive) tract, colon, and rectum.

How does the scan work?

During a virtual colonoscopy, many X-ray beams are passed through your abdomen at many angles. The X-ray tube revolves around you, and takes pictures from many angles, forming cross-section images (slices) of the area. Your doctor will view the pictures on a computer.

How do I prepare?

Please closely follow the instructions you received about how to prepare for your scan. You will use NuLytely and Readi-Cat2, and also start on a low-fiber diet.

You will be eating less than usual the day before and the day of your scan. If you have diabetes and take insulin or other diabetes medicines, talk with your provider about adjusting your dose while you are not eating your usual meals.

NuLytely

NuLytely is a laxative. It draws large amounts of water into your colon. This helps clean your colon before your scan. There are generic brands of laxative that your doctor or pharmacist may use instead of NuLytely.
You will need to buy NuLytely, or a generic laxative, at your pharmacy. Be sure to tell our scheduler what pharmacy you want to use.

Please note that you should **not** use NuLytely if you have:

- Infectious or inflammatory bowel disease (such as *ulcerative colitis* or *Crohn’s disease*)
- A blocked colon
- An allergy to NuLytely or its contents

If you have any questions about using NuLytely, please call our CT technologists at 206.598.2046.

**Readi-Cat2**

Readi-Cat2 is a type of contrast (X-ray dye). It coats the inside of your colon so that details show up more clearly on your scan images.

As soon as you set up your virtual colonoscopy appointment, we will mail you the Readi-Cat2 and instructions, and driving and parking directions.

### 2 Days Before Your Scan

- Stop taking any fiber supplements such as Metamucil, Citrucel, or Fiberall.
- Start eating a low-fiber diet:
  - **You may eat:** Enriched white bread, pasta and noodles; white rice; potatoes without skin; canned or well-cooked vegetables without skin or seeds; canned or fresh fruit without skin or membranes; tender meat, chicken, or fish.
  - **You must avoid:** Any food that contains seeds or nuts; whole grain bread or pasta; brown or wild rice; cereals such as oatmeal, shredded wheat, or granola; fruits and vegetables with skin or seeds.

### 1 Day Before Your Scan

On the day before your scan, you may eat or drink ONLY items listed in the table below. **If an amount is given, drink the full amount.**

| Breakfast (at about 12 noon) | • Clear soup (any broth)  
|                            | • Strained fruit juices without pulp  
|                            | • Flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add other ingredients)  
|                            | • Soft drinks, black coffee, or plain tea  
| Lunch (at about 12 noon)   | • Same items as listed for breakfast  
|                            | • Drink ⅔ of the bottle of Readi-Cat2 with lunch  

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*CT image of the colon*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 p.m.</td>
<td>Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
<td>Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.</td>
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<td>3 p.m.</td>
<td>Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.</td>
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<td>4 p.m.</td>
<td>Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.</td>
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| Dinner (about 5 p.m.) | - Clear soup (any broth)  
- Strained fruit juices without pulp  
- Flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add other ingredients)  
- Soft drinks, black coffee, or plain tea  
- Drink ⅓ of the bottle of Readi-Cat2 with dinner |
| 5 p.m. | - Using lukewarm water, fill the container of NuLytely powder to the 4-liter fill line. Put the cap back on the container. Shake it well several times (see the instructions on the container).  
- Drink 8 oz. (240 mL) of the NuLytely mixture every 10 minutes. Drink it quickly rather than sipping small amounts. This mixture will taste better when it is chilled, so put the container in the refrigerator when not drinking it.  
- If you are injecting the NuLytely through a nasogastric tube, the rate is 20 to 30 mL a minute, or 1.2 to 1.8 liters an hour.  
- You should have a bowel movement within 1 hour after you start drinking the NuLytely.  
- Keep drinking until only clear fluid comes out of your rectum. This is usually after drinking half a gallon.  
- You will likely have some abdominal bloating before your bowels start to move. But, if you have severe discomfort:  
  - Stop drinking the NuLytely until the symptoms ease, OR  
  - Drink smaller amounts with a longer time in between drinking |
| 6 p.m. | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water. |
| 7 p.m. | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water. |
| 8 p.m. | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water. |
| 9 p.m. | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water. |
### On the Day of Your Scan

- **Do NOT** eat anything before your scan.
- Take your usual medicines with **only** a sip of water.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- **Do not** wear clothing with zippers or snaps. Metal objects can affect the scanned image.
- **Women:** Tell your doctor or CT technologist if there is any chance that you are pregnant.

### How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you get into position on the table. Pillows will be used to help you stay in the right position during the scan.
- The technologist will insert a small tube into your rectum. This tube allows us to place **carbon dioxide** (CO2) gas into your bowel. The gas expands your bowel, which helps us get a clearer scan of the inside of your colon. It is normal to have a feeling of fullness from the CO2 gas, but you should have very little discomfort.
- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the technologist can see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom at all times.
- You will lie still while the table moves into the center of the scanner. You will also need to hold still when the scans are being done. Holding still during the scan results in the best CT pictures.
- For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner. These first scans check the correct starting position. For the rest of the scans, the table moves more slowly through the scanner.
- A virtual colonoscopy usually takes 30 to 45 minutes. When the scan is over, we may ask you to wait while we check the images for quality. A few more scans may be done, if needed.
- After the scan, you can go back to your normal activities and diet. Your body will quickly absorb the carbon dioxide. You will have little discomfort after the scan.
What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scanning does not cause any pain. You may feel some discomfort from needing to hold still during the scans.
- The carbon dioxide may cause a little discomfort for a short time.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the scan.
- For young patients, a parent may be able to stay in the room with their child to help reduce fear and provide comfort. The parent will need to wear a lead apron to limit exposure to the radiation used in the scan.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in CT scanning will review and interpret your CT images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results. The radiologist will send a detailed report to your primary care provider or referring doctor. Your doctor will give you the results.