Virtual Colonoscopy
How to prepare for your scan

What is a virtual colonoscopy?

A virtual colonoscopy is a computed tomography scan (CT or CAT scan) of the colon that uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures. CT pictures are far more detailed than a standard X-ray. CT is useful because it can show many types of organs – such as the liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys, lower gastrointestinal tract, colon, and rectum – at the same time.

How does the CT scan work?

Standard X-rays are pictures of the shadows created by body structures. CT scans use X-rays in a much different way. Many X-ray beams are passed through the abdomen/pelvis at many angles, and special detectors measure the amount of radiation absorbed by different tissues. The X-ray tube revolves around you, sending and recording images and forming cross-sectional pictures (slices) of the area. The images are then viewed on a computer screen.

Modern CT units, called spiral CT, produce higher-quality pictures in a shorter time. This is important for children and patients who are elderly or critically ill, as well as for those who cannot hold their breath for a long time. Today’s scanners can take images of large areas of the body during a single 20-second breath-hold.
How should I prepare for the CT scan?

You will receive bottles of Tagitol, a contrast agent, from the clinic. Starting 2 days before your scan, follow these instructions about what to eat and drink, and when to drink the Tagitol.

Two Days Before Your Scan

- Drink plenty of water or clear liquids throughout the day.
- Your breakfast may include:
  - White bread, low-fiber cereals, butter
  - Pulp-free juices, coffee, tea, milk, yogurt
  - 1 bottle of Tagitol
- Your lunch may include:
  - Tender, ground, and well-cooked meat, fish, or poultry
  - Limited servings of canned or well cooked vegetables that do NOT include skins, seeds, or pulp
  - Broth and strained soups
  - 1 bottle of Tagitol
- Your dinner may include:
  - Tender, ground, and well-cooked meat, fish, or poultry
  - Limited servings of canned or well-cooked vegetables with NO skins, seeds, or pulp
  - Broth and strained soups
  - 1 bottle of Tagitol
**One Day Before Your Scan**

On the day before your scan, drink plenty of water or clear liquids. You may eat or drink ONLY items listed below. **When quantities are given, be sure to drink the entire amount.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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| **Breakfast** | • Clear soup (any broth)  
• Strained fruit juices without pulp  
• Flavored gelatin that is not red (do **not** add extra ingredients)  
• Soft drinks, black coffee, or plain tea                               |
| 1 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| 2 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| 3 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| 4 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| **Lunch**     | • Clear soup (any broth)  
• Strained fruit juices without pulp  
• Flavored gelatin that is not red (do **not** add extra ingredients)  
• Soft drinks, black coffee, or plain tea                               |
| (about 12 noon)|                                                                                     |
| 1 p.m.        | Slowly add about ½ of the contents of **magnesium carbonate**, **citric acid**, and **potassium citrate** (from the LO SO Prep kit) to 8 ounces of cold water in a large glass that holds at least 16 ounces. Stir gently. After the fizzing stops, slowly add the rest of the packet to the glass. Drink the entire mixture in the glass. *(This product usually produces a bowel movement in 30 minutes to 6 hours.)* |
| 6 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| 7 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| **Dinner**    | • Clear soup (any broth)  
• Strained fruit juices without pulp  
• Flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add extra ingredients)  
• Soft drinks, black coffee, or plain tea                               |
| (about 5 p.m.)|                                                                                     |
| 7:30 p.m.     | Take the 4 **Bisacodyl tablets** (from the LO SO Prep kit) with 8 ounces of water. *(Bisacodyl tablets produce bowel movements in 6 to 12 hours.)* |
| 8 p.m.        | Drink 1 full 8-ounce glass of water.                                       |
| 9 p.m.        | Do **not** eat after 9 p.m. You should keep drinking clear liquids so that you are well hydrated. |
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

- UWMC Imaging Services: 206-598-6200
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206-744-3105

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On the Day of the Scan

- Do NOT eat anything before scan.
- Drink plenty of water or clear liquids.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing for your CT scan.
- 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 CT scan done?

1. The CT technologist will help you lie down on the CT table, and place pillows to help you stay in the correct position during the scan.
2. For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner to check the correct starting position. The rest of the scans are made as the table moves more slowly through the hole in the scanner.
3. A CT scan of the colon uses carbon dioxide to expand your bowel. The carbon dioxide will be introduced into your colon through a small tube inserted into your rectum. Your body will quickly absorb the carbon dioxide. You will have little discomfort after the scan.
4. The CT scan usually takes 30 to 45 minutes. When the scan is done, you may be asked to wait until the images are checked to find out if more images are needed.
5. After the CT scan, you can resume your normal daily activities.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scanning causes no pain, and with spiral CT, the need to lie still for any length of time is reduced. The carbon dioxide may cause a little discomfort for a short time.
- You will be alone in the room during the scan. But, the technologist can see you through a window and can hear you and speak with you at all times through an intercom.
- For pediatric patients, a parent may be allowed in the room with their child to help ease fear and provide comfort. The parent will need to wear a lead apron to prevent radiation exposure.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in CT scanning will review and interpret the CT findings. The radiologist will then send a detailed report to your primary care or referring doctor, who will give you the results. The radiologist will not discuss the results with you.