



What to Expect During Your First Colonoscopy

Most people don't get one until they're 50, but what if you're a teen who needs a colonoscopy?

One of the earliest memories I have of Irritable Bowel Syndrome is rocking back and forth on the toilet bowl, screaming and crying. I didn't understand why my stomach felt like a washing machine spin cycle. Despite my symptoms, I didn't get my first colonoscopy until years later.

As a teenager, I struggled with my [digestive health](#) daily. Also battling an [eating disorder](#), it was difficult to follow any type of diet that might ease my digestive woes because I was actively restricting myself from so many foods already. Cramps, nausea, and diarrhea became frequent symptoms that made it difficult for me to go to school. During my sophomore year, I missed so many days from being sick that I had to convince a committee of teachers why I shouldn't go to summer school.

I know I'm not alone, either. While there is limited information out there in regards to how many teens have digestive disorders, older research has estimated between 10 and 20% of children suffer from recurrent abdominal pain, according to the [National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#).

Despite exhibiting the symptoms of IBS for two decades, I didn't actually get my first colonoscopy until last year — at age 25. This was due to a bunch of factors, but also because, as someone who carries a lot of [trauma in their body](#), I often feel uncomfortable in medical settings since it can mean doctors getting up close and personal with my body.

If I'd had a better idea of what to expect during a colonoscopy, I probably would have taken action and got my first one a lot sooner. So you don't delay care like I did, *Teen Vogue* spoke with [Niket Sonpal, MD, an internist and gastroenterologist based in New York City](#), to get a better understanding of what to expect when getting a colonoscopy for the first time.

***Teen Vogue:* What is a colonoscopy?**

Niket Sonpal: A colonoscopy is an exam of the lower part of the gastrointestinal tract, which is called the colon or large intestine (bowel). A colonoscopy is a safe procedure that provides information other tests may not be able to give. Patients who require colonoscopy often have questions and concerns about the procedure. An exam is performed by inserting a device called a colonoscope into the anus and advancing through the entire colon. The procedure generally takes between 20 minutes and one hour.

***TV:* Under what circumstances would teens need to get a colonoscopy?**

The reasons why someone under the age of 50 [would get this procedure done] is for other GI conditions. Most often the reasons I see are rectal bleeding, constipation, and inflammatory bowel disease. Additionally for the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome to be made, a colonoscopy is necessary.

***TV:* How can teens prepare for such a procedure?**

NS: Before a colonoscopy, your colon must be completely cleaned out, so that the doctor can see any abnormal areas. This is vitally important to increase the chances that your doctor will identify abnormalities in your colon. If your colon is not completely cleaned out, the chances your doctor will miss abnormalities increases. Your doctor's office will provide specific instructions about how you should prepare for your colonoscopy. The best thing you can do is follow these directions carefully.

***TV:* Any tips for teens going through this procedure?**

NS: For my younger patients, I recommend a few things. Have [someone] who is a supportive adult drive you home as you will be lethargic from the anesthesia. Do the entire [preparation] bowel cleanse properly, otherwise you may have to do it again. Drink plenty of water while cleaning out and after the procedure to rehydrate. Ask questions as we are here to help and explain the procedure.

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