

CT Colonography (Virtual Colonoscopy)

Radiologists at VCU Health are among the first in Virginia to test and use a more patient-friendly way to screen for colon polyps.

The noninvasive treatment, Virtual Colonoscopy or CT Colonography, uses computed tomography (CT) scanning to determine whether or not colon polyps are present.

What makes CT Colonography a good option for screening?

This procedure is noninvasive, safe, does not require sedation, and takes only a few minutes to complete. CT Colonography allows for evaluation of the entire colon, something a standard colonoscopy may not be able to do due to narrowing, twists and turns in the large intestine.

CT Colonography is accurate in identifying significant polyps and is attractive to many patients who are simply not willing to undergo traditional colonoscopy, which is invasive, can be uncomfortable and requires sedation.

How accurate is CT Colonography, compared to conventional colonoscopy?

Early studies show that CT Colonography is comparable to conventional colonoscopy in terms of identifying polyps 6 millimeters or greater in size. Physicians at VCU Health use this procedure as a diagnostic tool to confirm or rule out the possibility of cancer. If large polyps are identified, traditional colonoscopy is required for biopsy and removal.

What can I expect when I have a CT Colonography procedure?

Patients will undergo bowel preparation one day prior to the exam, as they would for a standard colonoscopy.

The procedure itself calls for the patient to lie on the CT scan table while the colon is partially inflated with air using a tiny tube. Two 20-second CT scans are performed, one with the patient on their back and the other with the patient lying on their stomach.

In less than fifteen minutes, the examination is complete, and the patient is free to leave. No sedatives are required for this screening method.

Using data acquired from the CT scans, two-dimensional and three-dimensional images of the colon are obtained.

CT Colonography relies on specially developed computer software to recreate the inside of the colon, allowing a “fly-through” evaluation of the colon that provides the precise location and size of colon polyps or masses.



Why is it so important to be screened?

Research shows that less than 40% of those who should be screened actually do so. Left undetected, colon polyps larger than 7 to 10 millimeters are at risk of developing into colon cancer. If polyps are removed early on, colon cancer is preventable.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancers of the colon and rectum combined are the 3rd most common cancer for both men and women and the 3rd leading cause of cancer related to deaths overall. Screening and early removal of colon polyps can help prevent the development of colon cancer. 75% of all colon cancer cases occur in people with no known predisposing factors. This is why colon screening is so important.

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