Before the Test

Purpose of the test
- Helps confirm diagnosis of colon cancer and lower-bowel inflammatory disease.
- Detects polyps, inflammation and structural changes in the large intestine.

Where is the test performed?
- McKinley Health Center Radiology Department. Could also be done in an out-patient clinic or hospital.

Who performs the test?
- Physician (Radiologist) and Radiographer

Risks and precautions
- This test is hazardous if you have a rapid heartbeat (tachycardia) or severe colitis.
- Test should be done cautiously if you have ulcerative colitis, diverticulitis, acute, bloody diarrhea or suspected pneumatosis cystoides intestinalis.

Patient preparation
- Activity - Follow instructions provided for cleaning out the lower bowel for optimal X-ray images.
- Diet - low fiber diet with laxatives per prep sheet.
- Medicine - No changes necessary.

The Test

Sensory factors
- Touching - You may be uncomfortable for short periods when you assume the positions the radiographer requests. X-ray rooms are frequently uncomfortably cool when you disrobe for examination.
- Seeing - You will see strange-appearing heavy equipment in a small space, with a leaded window separating you from the radiographer.
- Hearing - You will hear the sounds of X-ray machine during exposure to X-ray films.
- Feeling - This procedure may cause discomfort and feeling of fullness in the bowels. You may feel the urgency of a bowel movement. It is important to hold the movement, until the films are taken. You may feel intimidated by the large equipment. Some degree of apprehension or fear is normal and should be expected. This discomfort disappears when the test is completed.
- Other senses (taste, smell) - Not affected.

Description of the test
- X-rays are taken of the colon/lower bowel.
- Maintain the position the radiographer requests. Hold absolutely still while the film is being exposed.
- The radiographer will tell you when you can move and breathe again.
- Barium and/or air are passed into the colon.
- Passage of the barium is followed fluoroscopically through the entire large intestine and into the cecum and lowest part of the small intestine.
- When all pictures are finished, empty the barium in the toilet.
- You will be asked to wait a short while until films are developed.

After the Test

Immediate post-test care
- If further X-rays are not ordered, resume normal diet.
- Drink plenty of fluids because the test can cause dehydration.

Activity after the test
- Your stool will still be light colored for 24 - 72 hours.
Time before the test result is available:
- It generally takes three working days for test results to be available.

Test Results

Test values
- Test results are determined by study of X-rays and fluoroscopic images.

Normal Values
- No abnormalities on X-rays of colon.

What “abnormal” may indicate
Adenocarcinoma, Sarcomas, Carcinoma, Diverticulitis, Granulomatous colitis, Ulcerative colitis, Broad-based villous polyps, Gastroenteritis, Intestinal structural changes, Irritable colon, Saccular adenomatous polyps, Acute appendicitis, Sigmoid torsion, Telescoping of the bowel, Vascular injury due to arterial occlusion.

Factors that may affect test results
- Inadequate bowel preparation impairs quality of the X-ray films.
- A barium-swallow test performed within several days before barium enema impairs the quality of the barium enema X-ray films.
- Your inability to retain the barium enema results in an incomplete test.

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu