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Gastroenterology and Endoscopy
Diseases of the Digestive Tract and Liver
Board Certified

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Capsule Endoscopy



What is Capsule Endoscopy?

Capsule Endoscopy lets your doctor examine the lining of the middle part of your gastrointestinal tract, which includes the three portions of the small intestine (duodenum, jejunum, ileum). Your doctor will use a pill sized video capsule, which has its own lens and light source and will view the images on a video monitor. You might hear your doctor or other medical staff refer to capsule endoscopy as small bowel endoscopy, capsule enteroscopy, or wireless capsule endoscopy.

Why is Capsule Endoscopy Done?

Capsule endoscopy helps your doctor evaluate the small intestine. This part of the bowel cannot be reached by traditional upper endoscopy or by colonoscopy. The most common reason for doing capsule endoscopy is to search for a cause of bleeding from the small intestine. It may also be useful for detecting polyps, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease), ulcers, and tumors of the small intestine.

How Should I Prepare for the Procedure?

An empty stomach allows for the best and safest examination, so you should have nothing to eat or drink, including water, for approximately twelve hours before the examination. Your doctor will tell you when to start fasting.

Tell your doctor in advance about any medications you take including iron, aspirin, bismuth subsalicylate products and other "over-the-counter" medications. You might need to adjust your usual dose prior to the examination.

Discuss any allergies to medications as well as medical conditions, such as swallowing disorders and heart or lung disease.

Tell your doctor of the presence of a pacemaker, previous abdominal surgery, or previous history of obstructions in the bowel, inflammatory bowel disease, or adhesions.

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What Can I Expect During Capsule Endoscopy?

Your doctor will prepare you for the examination by applying a sensor device to your abdomen with adhesive sleeves (similar to tape). The capsule endoscope is swallowed and passes naturally through your digestive tract while transmitting video images to a data recorder worn on your belt for approximately eight hours. At the end of the procedure you will return to the office and the data recorder is removed so that images of your small bowel can be put on a computer screen for physician review.

What Happens After Capsule Endoscopy?

You will be able to drink clear liquids after about two hours and eat a light meal after five hours following the capsule ingestion, unless your doctor instructs you otherwise. You will have to avoid vigorous physical activity such as running or jumping during the study. Your doctor generally can tell you the test results within the week following the procedure; however, the results of some tests might take longer.

What are the Possible Complications of Capsule Endoscopy?

Although complications can occur, they are rare. Potential complications include capsule retention. This is usually due to a stricture (narrowing) of the intestine from inflammation, prior surgery, or tumor. It's important to recognize early signs of possible complications. If you have evidence of obstruction, such as unusual bloating, pain, and/or vomiting, call your doctor immediately. Also, if you develop a fever after the test, have trouble swallowing or experience increasing chest pain, tell your doctor immediately. Be careful not to prematurely disconnect the system as this may result in loss of image acquisition.

Annotated from the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, ©ASGE, 2007.1520
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