Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

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Flexible sigmoidoscopy is done to detect cancer in the portion of the colon close to the rectum and anus. This region is called the 'sigmoid colon'. A small tube containing viewing equipment is placed through the anus into the colon. As the tube is slowly removed from the colon, the doctor looks for any abnormalities. If a polyp or other abnormality is identified, a biopsy may be taken to test for the presence of cancer. Polyps may also be removed. If polyps are detected, a full colonoscopy may be recommended to check the entire colon and remove any additional polyps. There are rarely any major complications, but feeling bloated and cramping is normal. A patient experiencing chills, fever, or excessive rectal bleeding (a small amount is normal after this procedure) should seek medical attention.1

In a 2017 BMJ pooled analysis of 287,928 patients it was found that flexible sigmoidoscopy screenings reduced the incidence of colorectal cancer in all men and women under the age of 60, which showcases the benefit of the screening. In the study flexible sigmoidoscopy performed well against other means of colon cancer detection.2

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1 Colorectal Screening Methods. Cancer Research Foundation of America (2002). [http://www.preventcancer.org/colorectal/aboutcolorectal/about_screening.cfm]

2 Holme, Ø., Schoen, R. E., Senore, C., Segnan, N., Hoff, G., Løberg, M., ⋯ Kalager, M. (2017). Effectiveness of flexible sigmoidoscopy screening in men and women and different age groups: pooled analysis of randomised trials. The BMJ, 356, i6673. http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i6673