

PATIENT QUESTIONS REGARDING VIRTUAL COLONOSCOPY, ALSO KNOWN AS CT COLONOGRAPHY,
VERSUS COLONOSCOPY FOR COLON CANCER SCREENING

CT colonography may eventually be a useful test, however, it has significant limitations.

1. It is not as precise as colonoscopy in finding small polyps. More importantly, it will miss flat polyps or depressed polyps. These are important because they have a higher risk of becoming colon cancer.
2. Approximately 35% of people who have routine screening colonoscopy will have polyps. Therefore, if they have had a CT colonography and polyps are found, they will need a colonoscopy anyway. Therefore, they will then have had two procedures, instead of one.
3. Not uncommonly, other unexpected abnormalities are detected at the time of colonoscopy. Most of these would not be found on CT colonography.
4. CT colonography is painful because of all of the air that is used to distend the colon. The air is not removed afterwards, as it is with colonoscopy. Therefore, CT colonography can be quite uncomfortable.
5. CT colonography is less expensive than colonoscopy. However, if one ends up needing two procedures instead of one, it ends up being more expensive. Because of the way we do colonoscopies at Saltzer Medical Group without a facility fee, our costs are much less anyway than if procedures are done elsewhere, such as hospital or out-patient endoscopy centers.
6. Within the last year, a federally appointed, blue-ribbon panel of health experts extensively reviewed the issue of CT colonography being used for colon cancer screening. It's recommendations were that it was not the best available test and, therefore, it would not be covered by Medicare or Medicaid.