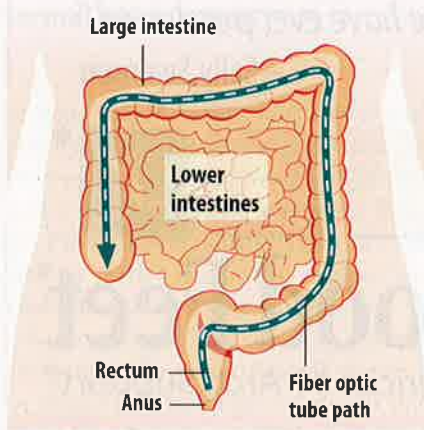


# Colonoscopies

## The basics

Colon/rectal cancer is the No. 2 cause of cancer deaths in North America, after lung cancer. A colonoscopy, performed by a physician, looks for cancers or pre-cancerous changes in the large intestine.



Source: Mayo Clinic

### The process

1. The patient is given a mild anesthesia.
2. A flexible fiber-optic tube about a half-inch in diameter is inserted into the rectum and threaded through the colon.
3. Through this tube the physician can get a clear view of the colon walls as the tube advances.
4. If a polyp or other abnormal growth is found, a small cutter removes a sample for a microscopic examination (biopsy).
5. After the procedure you will need somebody to drive you home due to anesthesia received.

PATRICK GARVIN AND KYLE BENTLE/The Times-Union

### By JAMES CANNON

Amy Goosby, a 38-year-old Jacksonville resident, said she has gone through hell since her June 4 diagnosis of colon cancer. But her suffering has already started to help her loved ones avoid the same fate.

She went to the hospital because of bleeding and fatigue. After doctors performed a CT scan and found no problems, gastroenterologist Vikram Gopal with Baptist Medical Center ordered a colonoscopy.

Even though it was more than a decade before her first recommended screening, the results showed she was in the third stage of colon cancer. Gopal said if Goosby had waited another six months, it likely would have been untreatable.

Goosby is one of more than 106,100 Americans who are diagnosed with colon cancer annually, according to a recent study by the American Cancer Society.

Gopal said colon cancer is the most preventable type of cancer if a

colonoscopy, an exam that allows a doctor to closely look at the inside of the colon, is performed at regular intervals for people 50 and older. But if there is family history of colon cancer or polyps, the patient should begin testing a decade before the age their relative was diagnosed.

"I don't want to scare everyone into thinking they have colon cancer because Amy had symptoms and no immediate family history, but everyone should consult their primary care physician regularly," Gopal said.

Since Goosby's diagnosis, she has become quite the vocal advocate for colonoscopies, Gopal said. She got her parents to come in and get tested, and because of that, the physicians were able to remove their polyps before they might have turned cancerous, he said.

"Based on the fact that I'm 38, and that I had no immediate family history, it was quite shocking," Goosby said. "But after doing some family research, I discovered that there were several cases in my extended family."

Gopal acknowledged the

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### Before a colonoscopy

Follow the instructions. You may experience irritation around the anus due to the passage of liquid stools. To prevent and treat the irritation, you should:

1. Apply ointment to the skin around the anus before drinking the medications.
2. Wipe the skin after each bowel movement with disposable wet wipes.
3. Sit in a bathtub filled with warm water for 10 to 15 minutes after passing a stool; after soaking, blot skin dry with a soft cloth, apply ointment to the anal area.

### During a colonoscopy

You are given a pain reliever and a sedative intravenously to relax you. You will lie on the left side, with your knees drawn up toward your chest. A small amount of air is used to expand the colon so the physician can see the colon walls. You may feel mild cramping during the procedure, which lasts from 30 minutes to one hour.

### After a colonoscopy

You may feel some cramping or a temporary sensation to pass gas. Avoid alcohol, driving, and operating machinery for 24 hours. You may resume a normal diet, but it's recommended to wait until the next day to resume normal activities. If polyps were removed or a biopsy done, avoid aspirin, products containing aspirin, or anti-inflammatory drugs for two weeks after the procedure.

Source: The Cleveland Clinic

uncomfortable stigma surrounding the procedure but said a few minutes of discomfort far outweighs death or months of chemotherapy.

Prepping for a colonoscopy typically requires about an hour before the procedure to ingest laxatives that cleanse the colon for a clearer picture, 20 to 30 minutes for the colonoscopy procedure itself and about an hour after for observation.

Mayo Clinic is working on several new methods to make the procedure less invasive including confocal microscopy, which is an optical imaging technique that allows physicians to diagnose whether the polyp has potential to become cancerous.

Rather than removing the polyp for the pathologist to diagnose if it's benign or cancerous, the confocal microscope will determine the nature of the growth without removing it, said physician Michael Wallace, professor and associate chair of medicine and director of research at Mayo Clinic Florida.

"Hyperplastic polyps look cancerous but have almost no chance of actually becoming cancerous," Wallace said. "Although colonoscopies are safe, removing unnecessary polyps does slightly increase the likelihood of bleeding. [Confocal microscopes] basically reduce the risk and cost of the procedure while maintaining equal effectiveness."

As in Goosby's case, many doctors are able to diagnose the polyp before it leaves the colon walls. But Goosby is healthy considering the circumstances and is expected to complete her last four rounds of chemotherapy in December, she said.

"I am a very spiritual person, and I was saved for a reason," Goosby said. "I am a very vocal advocate for the tests, and if I can save just one person, it will be worth it." **H**

James Cannon is a University of North Florida student and a former intern of The Florida Times-Union.

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