Frequently asked questions

How long should I allow for my appointment in Endoscopy?

Your appointment letter will state that you need to allow between 2- 4 hours for your visit to the Endoscopy department.

Why does it take 2 - 4 hours?

The appointment time is measured from the time you register at Endoscopy reception to your departure from the department. It includes pre procedure checks, the time you spend waiting for the examination, the time the actual examination takes, the time you need to recover from it and the time taken getting yourself ready to go home.

How long does the examination take?

The actual time spent on an examination will vary between patients and examinations. In general, an examination of the stomach (gastroscopy) will take 5-15 minutes and one of the colon (colonoscopy) 20-40 minutes.

Do I need to bring anything with me?

You don't need to bring anything specific with you (no change of clothing etc). You might like to bring the instructions sent to you with your appointment details.

Do I need to starve beforehand?

The instructions sent to you with your appointment details will clearly explain what you will need to do to prepare for the endoscopy. Information about specific procedures can be found in patient information leaflets.

Patient information leaflets

Do I need to bring someone with me?

Whether you need to bring someone with you as an escort depends on whether you will
have a sedative for the endoscopy. If you have a sedative, it is important that you have someone to help you home afterwards, including being driven home. You will be advised of whether you need to have a sedative in your appointment letter. For some examinations, you can opt not to have a sedative and, therefore, do not need to bring an escort with you (see below).

Why do we offer you a sedative injection?

The gut lining does not have nerves that give sharp pains but they can sense movement, stretching or pressure. If no sedative is used, some endoscopies can be uncomfortable but not painful.

For examinations of the pancreas and gall bladder (ERCP), it is accepted practice for people to be offered a sedative, and most people decide to have one. For examinations of the colon (colonoscopy), it is accepted practice to offer a sedative, and most people decide to have one but some prefer not to. For a flexible sigmoscopy, which is a shorter examination of the (sigmoid colon) bowel, more people choose not to have a sedative.

For other examinations, such as a gastroscopy, the use of a sedative is less necessary because they take less time and are less uncomfortable. About half of the people who come for a gastroscopy elect to have a local anaesthetic throat spray alone, rather than with the sedative injection.

What does the sedative do?

The sedative we use most often is Midazolam (a type of valium) which makes you feel sleepy and more comfortable. Usually the sedative does not actually send you to sleep, but makes you feel sleepy. Also, you might not remember anything about the examination afterwards. These sedatives start to work very quickly but take hours to wear off (up to 24 hours).

How will I feel after having the sedative?

If you have had a sedative, after your endoscopy examination you will feel very sleepy at first and then you might feel a little drowsy and unsteady. After a variable number of hours, you will feel much more normal again but we advise you not to resume driving for 24 hours or carry out any work or leisure activity that could be compromised by a lack of attention. These effects are often why people opt not to have a sedative.

How long do I have to spend in the Department after the examination?

If you haven't had a sedative, you can usually leave immediately after the examination.

If you have had a sedative, we encourage you to stay in the Department until you are feeling
more awake, for example until you can walk safely, which is usually within an hour of having the sedative. Again, if you have had a sedative, you must not drive or carry out any work or leisure activity (including operating machinery) that could be dangerous if you have a lack of attention immediately afterwards, and you are strongly advised not to for 24 hours afterwards. You will also be advised of this in your appointment letter.

**Do I have to have a sedative?**

This depends on the examination you are to have. You can discuss this with your referring GP or someone in Endoscopy beforehand - do phone us in advance to see if you will need to arrange to bring someone with you. For examinations of the stomach (gastroscopy), approximately half of our patients choose to have a local anaesthetic spray to the back of the throat alone, instead of with a sedative injection. The choice is yours.

**What does the local anaesthetic throat spray involve?**

If you have chosen not to have a sedative injection before a gastroscopy, before your examination, we will spray the back of your throat with a local anaesthetic to numb it (preventing any pain). You will still have a gag reflex but will feel the tube (scope) much less as you swallow it. The numbing lasts for about half an hour. If you decide to have the throat spray, you will remain fully conscious during the procedure and will remember it afterwards. You will be aware of movement of the tube and we will need to introduce some air into your stomach to allow us to see inside it; this can feel like you are 'bloated'. Having the throat spray is a good alternative if you cannot have a sedative for any reason, or if you do not want to be sleepy for the rest of the day. If you choose to have the throat spray without a sedative, you will be able to leave the department as soon as the examination is complete, which is usually within half an hour of the appointment time.

**Why does my 'escort' need to stay with me, and why can't they just come and pick me up from the outpatient entrance?**

If you are having a sedative injection for the examination, it is very important that we know you will have someone to help you get home safely afterwards (you will feel sleepy and must not drive). In the past, some people have told us they were going to be picked up later, so we did the examination and gave them a sedative, but then we found out that they intended to drive themselves home. For this reason, we like to know that someone is ready to take you from the Endoscopy department and will see you home safely. If not, this has medico-legal implications for us and we will worry that you won't get home safely. If you arrive by hospital transport, you do not need to arrange your own escort because the drivers can vouch for your safety, but you will need to make sure that someone is at home to receive you from the transport.
I will not be able to bring anyone with me, what should I do?

If you are having an examination of your stomach (gastroscopy), it is possible to do this while you are awake (see above) using a throat spray and no sedative. If you can't bring an escort with you, this is what we will suggest to you. For other examinations, do discuss the options with your GP or with someone in Endoscopy. Most people who are very keen to have a sedative can ask a friend or relative to come with them for two hours, and see them home safely. It is very rare that we need to arrange for an overnight stay for a patient when no escort is available.

Patient information leaflets