

Small Bowel Capsule Endoscopy (Pill Camera)

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 called an endoscope, 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 endoscopy, or wireless 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.

As is the case with most new diagnostic procedures, not all insurance companies are currently reimbursing for this procedure. You may need to check with your own insurance company to ensure that this is a covered benefit.

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.

Most patients consider the test comfortable. The capsule endoscope is about the size of a large pill. After ingesting the capsule and until it is excreted, you should not be near an MRI device or schedule an MRI examination.

What happens after Capsule Endoscopy?

You will be able to drink clear liquids after two hours and eat a light meal after four 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.