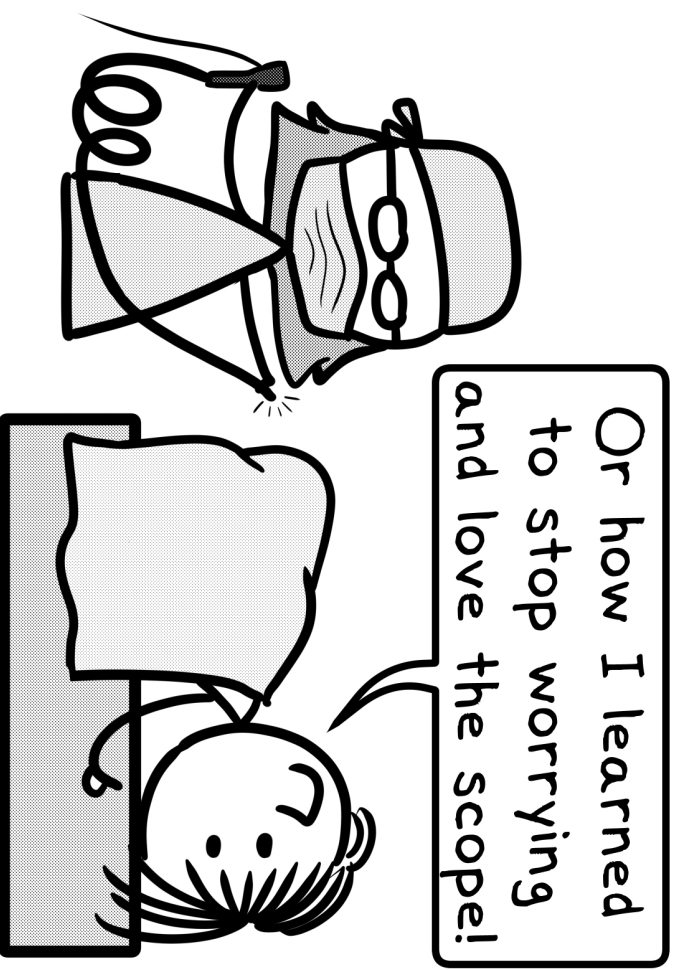


Fun and Polyps!



A Beginner's Guide to Colonoscopies

by Mya L. Gosling

DISCLAIMER: I am not a doctor in any way, shape, or form. The information in this comic is a reflection of my own experiences and understanding of the conditions and procedures discussed, but should absolutely *not* substitute for talking with a qualified medical professional. Don't take medical advice from stick figures.

If the idea of getting something stuck up your butt freaks you out, consider the size of a typical scope. Are your poops larger than that? I sure hope so! Your butthole can handle something this tiny without any problem.

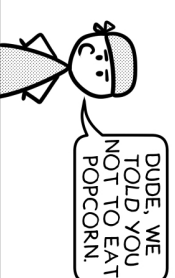


Typical diameter of 1.0-1.2 cm, i.e. smaller than a dime!

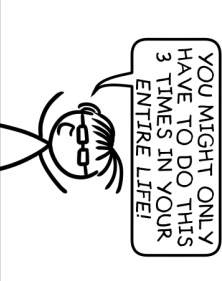
After everything is over you will find yourself in recovery, probably feeling a little groggy, while various nurses and techs remove your IV, and do a bunch of mysterious paperwork.



Your doctor will stop by to let you know what they found, if anything, and recommend when you should next get a colonoscopy.



Again, for most people who, unlike me, suck at farming polyps, this will be in 5 or 10 **years**.



After that there's only one more important thing to be decided...



Confession time: I desperately want you to get a colonoscopy. I know many people who have lost friends and relatives at shockingly young ages to colorectal cancer and those numbers are only going up.

You can't do much to actively prevent most types of cancer. You just wait for them to show up and then react. But colonoscopies not only screen for cancer but also actively help to prevent it from developing in the first place. How immensely cool is that?

Postscript: If you had polyps removed you might have some mild bleeding when you go to the bathroom for a day or two. This is totally normal.



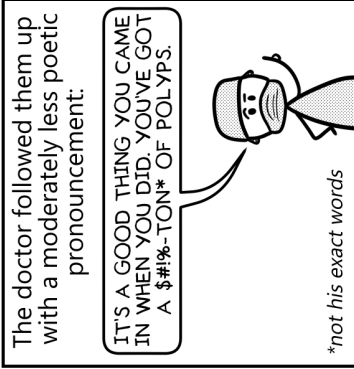
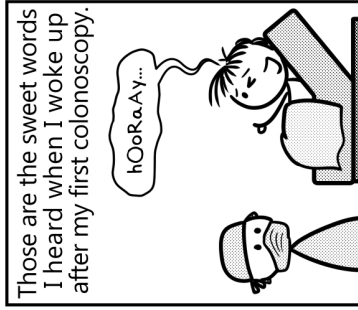
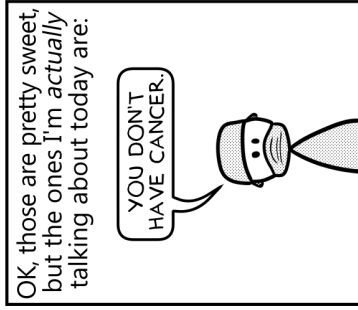
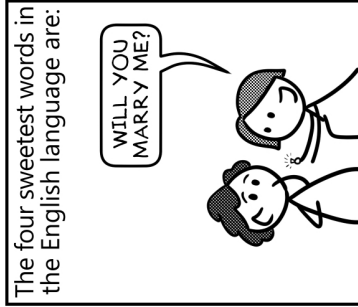
Are colonoscopies fun? Eh... not really. I'm trying really hard to sell you on them, but I have to admit they are unpleasant and inconvenient. But they are also very safe, relatively painless and *might* just save your life. Isn't your life worth sitting on the toilet for a couple hours every few years?

SO BE A BADASS BY KEEPING THE INSIDE OF YOUR ASS FROM GOING BAD. GET A COLONOSCOPY AND YOU TOO CAN HEAR THE FOUR SWEETEST WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:



OK... those are pretty sweet words too.





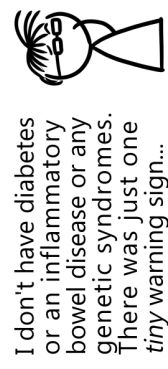
*not his exact words

A **colonoscopy** is a medical procedure that screens for, among other things, colorectal cancer (**CRC**), which is the fourth most common type of cancer in the United States.

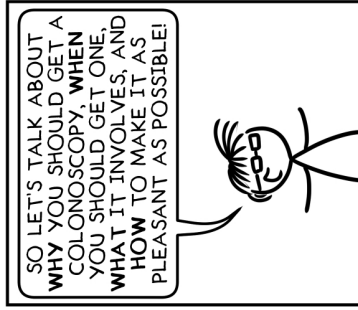
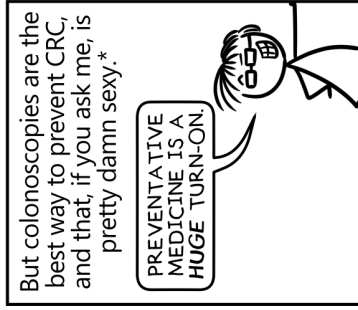
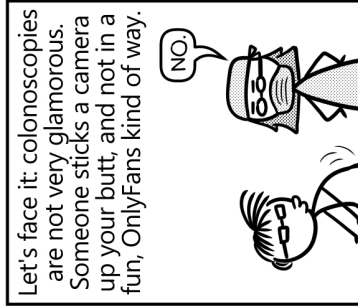
While mostly found in older individuals, in recent years CRC has become scarier more prevalent in younger populations, for unknown reasons.

As an elder millennial I was still several years shy of 45, the age that the American Cancer Society recommends people start routine colonoscopy screenings. I didn't need one... did I?

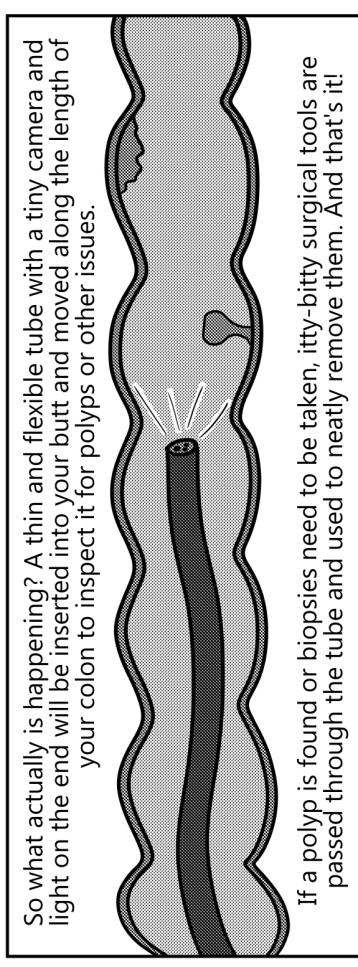
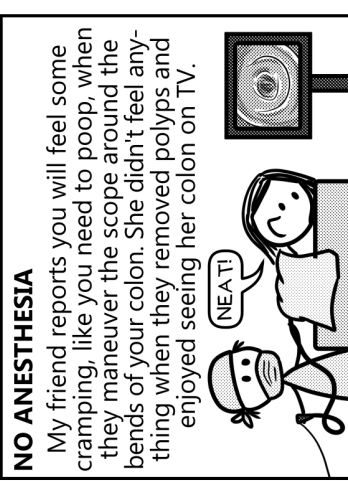
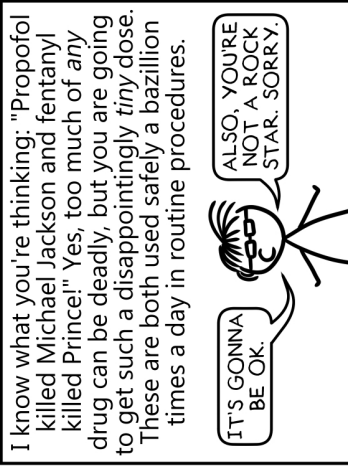
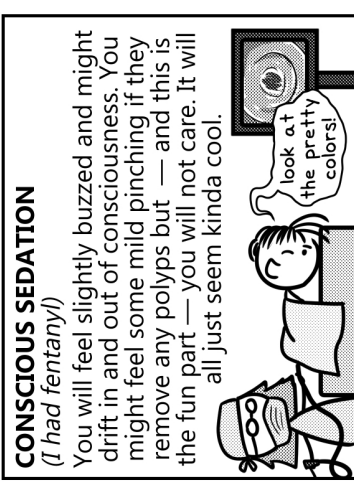
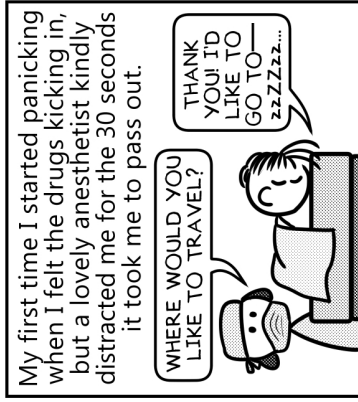
Overall I am in great shape! I don't have any pre-existing conditions or lifestyle factors that would have increased my risk of developing CRC. I am fit and trim — you can see my abs if you squint — I exercise regularly, I eat reasonably healthily, I don't smoke or drink.



FAMILY HISTORY OF POLYPS



This is where the anesthesia comes into play. If this is your very first time getting "knocked out," this will most likely be the part that freaks you out the most. I was absolutely **terrified** at the very idea of involuntarily losing consciousness.



2 *There are other options to **detect** CRC besides colonoscopies, including fecal and imaging tests, but colonoscopies are the gold standard in not only detecting but also **preventing** CRC.

I think the part I hate most about this whole process is right here, when I've finished the prep but still need to wait until it's time to leave. I'm tired from not sleeping well, I'm hungry from not eating for over 24 hours, and I'm starting to get a bit anxious about everything.

I GENERALLY DEAL WITH THIS BY WANDERING AIMLESSLY AROUND THE HOUSE PERIODICALLY SHOUTING "I'M TIRED" OR "I'M HUNGRY" OR "I'M ANXIOUS" OUT LOUD LIKE A DYSGREGULATED TODDLER. BUT I KNOW THAT FEELING THIS WAY MEANS THAT THE END IS IN SIGHT!



THE PROCEDURE

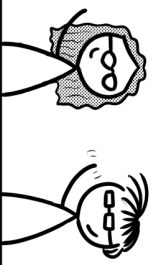
a.k.a.

"The End Is Literally In Sight"

OR

"Look Up My Butt"

Colonoscopies are usually performed with some type of anesthesia, so you will need to find a responsible adult to escort you to and from your appointment.



If you can't find any responsible adults, a friend will do.

SO CAN I FILM YOU WAKING UP ALL DRUGGED OUT IN RECOVERY?

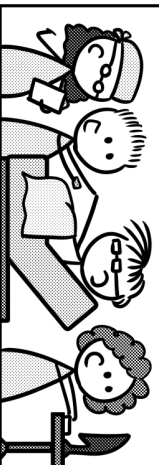


When you go back for your appointment you will have to change into one of those atrocious hospital gowns that open in the back.



HOW HAVE WE NOT MANAGED TO IMPROVE THESE YET?!

You'll then get settled in a bed while a steady stream of people take your vital signs, ask you questions about your health and meds, and check you out for anesthesia. Let them know if you have any concerns. You deserve to feel safe.



Someone will also put an I.V. in your arm. This is probably the most painful part of the colonoscopy experience, but it doesn't last very long.

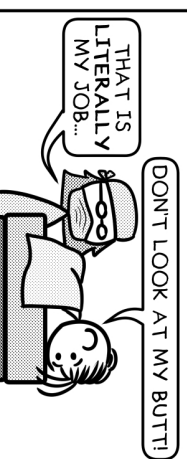


ARE YOU DOING OK?

YES I JUST DONT WANT TO WATCH! LALALALAI

You will be wheeled into the procedure room, which generally gives off a vibe of controlled chaos, and will be asked to sign an "informed consent" form saying you are aware of the risks of the procedure. This is always a bit scary because one of the listed risks is DEATH, but let's stay calm... colonoscopies are very low-risk. Your chances of suffering a severe complication are around 1 to 3 in 1000. Your chances of developing colorectal cancer? Around 1 in 22. Even Han Solo would appreciate those odds.

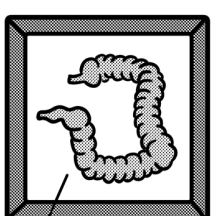
At this point you will be asked to roll onto your left side. This will make you feel vulnerable because your mostly uncovered butt will be facing a room full of people. But don't worry! They have trained their entire lives for this moment.



DONT LOOK AT MY BUTT!

THAT IS LITERALLY MY JOB...

Your colon makes up the majority of your large intestine. Its job is to turn whatever food your body hasn't absorbed into poop and eventually expel it.



IT'S ABOUT FIVE FEET LONG, OR ONE AND A HALF HOBBITS.



It's tempting to ignore polyps because they don't cause any symptoms and can take up to ten years to develop into cancer...



don't mind me...

...but once you do start having symptoms that generally means cancer has already developed, and you're in for some difficult, life-altering treatment.



MAHHHHH!!!

So that's **why** you should get a colonoscopy. But **when** should you get one? Well, you should absolutely get one when you are **45+** years old; it's a modern-day rite of passage that separates the children from the adults. You should also talk to your doctor about getting one earlier than that if:

- You have blood in your stool. This is the quickest way to get a colonoscopy.
- Your poop is weird. If you have persistent constipation or diarrhea, or your poop is abnormally thin, black, or sticky, tell your doctor. I guarantee you they are used to talking about poop. You're not going to gross them out.
- You have an inflammatory bowel disease or other GI condition.
- You have relatives who have had CRC or a history of colon polyps. "So... had any colon polyps recently?" is a great topic of conversation at family dinners, trust me on this. It certainly beats talking about politics.*

Unfortunately, because we can't have nice things, the lining of your colon will sometimes develop tissue growths called **polyps**. There are different kinds, many of which are harmless, but some have the potential to develop into cancer.



Colonoscopies are awesome because they can find and remove polyps before they even think about turning cancerous! NOT TODAY, POLYP!

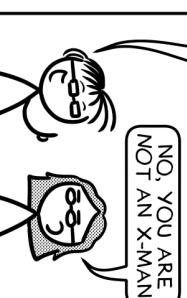


noo!

I went for genetic testing to see if I had an inherited polyp condition, but no.

WHAT ABOUT THE X-GENE?

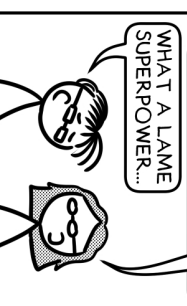
NO, YOU ARE NOT AN X-MAN.



It turns out I'm just naturally really talented at growing polyps.


YOU'RE WHAT WE CALL A POLYP FARMER.

WHAT A LAME SUPERPOWER...




*It's important to find out **when** your relatives first had CRC or polyps! It's recommended that you get a colonoscopy when you are 10 years younger than they were when they first had CRC or polyps.

Most people will have few or no polyps, and will have to get routine colonoscopies only once every 5 or 10 years.




ME? EVERY 6 MONTHS, BABY!

I'VE ALREADY HAD TWO AND A HALF COLONOSCOPES, WHICH MAKES ME A PATIENT-LEVEL EXPERT ON THEM. IT'S NOT AN EXPERTISE I PARTICULARLY WANTED TO HAVE...



...BUT SINCE I HAVE IT I'M GOING TO SHARE WITH YOU MY INSIGHTS INTO THE ENTIRE PROCESS. WELCOME TO COLONOSCOPY 101!



HUGE DISCLAIMER

All this information is from my own personal experience. Your medical providers might very well do things differently and that's OK! For the love of God, follow their instructions instead of the addled ramblings of someone who can't even draw noses properly!


THE PREP

a.k.a.

"The Poopening"


or

"I Can't Believe Some People Cleanse Their Colons for Fun"




THINK "LAXATIVE" BUT ON STEROIDS.

Your prep might vary, but a common one is polyethylene glycol, or PEG. It comes as powder in a big gallon jug.





I CALL THIS THE JUG O' FUN!




YOU HAVE A VERY DISTORTED IDEA OF WHAT'S "FUN"...

Tell your doctor if you have constipation and they might give you something a bit stronger. The last thing you want is to show up on the day and be told you you have to do it all over again because your colon isn't clean enough.





The colonoscopy walk of shame

You'll also get a schedule outlining when to stop taking various meds and what foods to avoid in the days leading up to your procedure. Pay attention to this. If you've got too many indigestible tomato seeds or popcorn hulls floating around in your colon, guess what?




DON'T TELL ME, I HAVE TO DO IT—




—ALL OVER AGAIN, YES.

REMEMBER, THE PENALTY FOR NOT TAKING YOUR PREP INSTRUCTIONS SERIOUSLY IS HAVING TO DO EVERYTHING ALL OVER AGAIN. DON'T PLAY AROUND. TELL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOUR PREP ISN'T WORKING FOR YOU!*




The day before your procedure you will stop eating solid foods and switch to a **clear** liquid diet. I like broth, various teas (black — no milk!) and popsicles.




BUT NOTHING RED OR PURPLE THAT MIGHT LOOK LIKE BLOOD!

LIME JELLO IS ALWAYS RECOMMENDED, BUT I ATE TOO MUCH OF IT MY FIRST TIME AROUND AND NOW I JUST CAN'T STAND IT. TRY IT FOR YOURSELF, THOUGH!




This is also when you will make what I lovingly call your "poop juice" by filling your jug o' fun with water and shaking it until all the powder has dissolved.




POOP JUICE, SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED.

Most people agree that chugging the poop juice is the worst part of getting a colonoscopy. It doesn't taste bad, but it is a **lot** of liquid on an empty stomach and you might feel a bit nauseous.*



IT'S A BIT EASIER TO DRINK IF CHILLED, BUT MAKE SURE IT'S NOT TOO COLD. I'VE GIVEN MYSELF AN ICE CREAM HEADACHE FROM THIS STUFF BEFORE...

In the evening you'll drink a cup of poop juice every 15 minutes for two hours until half of the jug o' fun is empty.



CHUG! CHUG! CHUG!

TOILET WIPES


If you have a bidet, great! Otherwise these will help you not get raw. Do not flush them, though, even if they say "flushable."

TOILET STOOL

Something that allows you to change your position while sitting. A Squatty Potty, some yoga blocks, a stack of books, whatever you have around.



MY POOPENING SET-UP



SMALL TABLE

Somewhere to place your drinks, phone, etc.


TABLET/PHONE STAND

So you can watch stuff. I use this time to get caught up on all the Marvel content I've missed. Don't forget a charger!

HEADPHONES


So you can hear your media over the bathroom fan.

Then it's back to the toilet for The Poopening, Pt. II. After a couple more hours your poop should be more like pee: completely liquid and clear, or slightly yellow.




WHICH IS WHICH?

Around five hours before your appointment you will start chugging your remaining poop juice.



WORST BREAKFAST EVER.

The "peeing through your butt hole" phrase is GREAT because it means you are one giant step towards everything being OVER!



ABOUT FRICKIN' TIME...

4 *Again, everything I'm saying here is based solely on my own personal experience! Your prep, process, and schedule might be completely different and that's OK! Listen to your doctor!

*If you have a really hard time chugging a gallon of PEG, ask your doctor about "low volume" prep options, which involve drinking a smaller amount of liquid.