

# Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)

## What is an ERCP?

- An ERCP is an examination of the bile system (drainage routes) of the gallbladder, liver, and pancreas with a flexible, lighted tube called an endoscope.
- The doctor injects contrast dye into the bile system while x-rays are taken. X-rays allow the doctor to view the bile system, gallbladder, liver, and the pancreas.
- This test is done to identify diseases of the gallbladder, bile system, liver, and pancreas. Narrowing strictures or stones may be found in the bile system during this test.

## What is a sphincterotomy?

- Sphincterotomy is cutting the muscle (papilla) that surrounds the opening of the duct.
- A small wire with electric current is used to cut the muscle and make the opening larger.
- This will not cause you pain. Opening the duct makes it possible for the doctor to remove stones, place stents, dilate strictures and take tissue samples.

## How do I prepare for an ERCP?

- You will be asked not to eat or drink after midnight the night before the test.
- Arrange for a driver and someone to be with you for the day. You will not be allowed to drive after receiving anesthesia.
- All jewelry should be left at home.
- Dentures and glasses will be removed before the ERCP.
- If you are taking Coumadin, Plavix or other blood thinners, let your doctor know before the day of the exam.

- Tell your doctor if you are allergic to iodine-containing drugs or IV contrast dye.
- Some people may need antibiotics.
- Be sure to let your doctor know if you are pregnant before the day of the exam.

## What are the potential complications?

- A tear in the wall of the esophagus, stomach, duodenum, bile duct, or pancreatic duct.
- Undesired side effects from anesthesia.
- Infection or bleeding.
- Inflammation of the pancreas (Pancreatitis).
- Complications from unrelated diseases.

## What should I expect during the test?

- Your doctor will explain the risks and benefits of ERCP before the test.
- You will sign a consent form for the test.
- The ERCP will be done with x-rays.
- An IV will be put in a vein to give you fluids and anesthesia medications.
- Your blood pressure, pulse and oxygen levels will be monitored.
- You will be lying on an x-ray table on your stomach.
- General anesthesia will be used to put you to sleep.
- A tube will be placed in your airway to help you breathe during the ERCP.
- The endoscope will be passed through your mouth.

- When the endoscope is in place, your doctor will inject a contrast material (dye) into the bile system and x-rays will be taken.
- Depending on what the x-rays show, the doctor will decide the best way to treat your problem or disease.

## What can I expect after the test?

- Your blood pressure, pulse, respirations, and oxygen levels will be monitored for up to an hour in the recovery room.
- Your family may be with you during your recovery time.
- You will have oxygen on for a short time after the test.
- You might feel bloated or pass gas because of the air put in during the test.
- What and when you can eat will be decided by your doctor.
- If you are taking Coumadin, Plavix or other blood thinners, ask your doctor when to restart.
- Depending on your test results, your doctor may want you to stay in the hospital overnight for observation.
- A nurse will give you written instructions before you leave.

## When will I get my results?

- Your doctor will tell you what was found before you go home.
- You will receive your biopsy results in the mail in two to three weeks.
- You may call your doctor's office with any questions or concerns.

Reference: [Understanding ERCP](#) - The American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)

[Understanding Therapeutic ERCP](#) – The American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)