

Illinois Heart & Lung Associates - Patient Services

Bronchoscopy

A Direct Exam of Your Airways

Bronchoscopy is a painless, direct examination of your air passages. It may be used to gather specimens, to diagnose tumors, and to find and remove foreign objects in the lungs. A bronchoscope, a flexible tube with a powerful light source and optical lenses, is used. Bronchoscopy is performed by specially trained physicians, including pulmonary medicine specialists, thoracic surgeons, and otolaryngologists.

Getting Ready

- No food or drink for 8 hours before the exam.
- Empty bladder before the exam.
- Sign consent form.
- Premedication may be given for relaxation and to dry mouth and nasal secretions.
- X-rays may be taken before the exam.

Compliance Note

- Follow your doctor's instructions carefully. If you don't, the exam may be cancelled or repeated.

Anatomy of Bronchoscopy

Entry to your air passages and lungs is through your nose or mouth. Though smaller air passages and the lungs themselves cannot be examined, the bronchoscope enables the physician to view your main air passages directly.

How Bronchoscopy Works

The bronchoscope is inserted through the nose or mouth into the trachea and bronchi. The bronchoscope includes a powerful light source and flexible tip that allow the operator to explore smaller passages precisely. A small channel within the bronchoscope permits insertion of fine forceps for biopsy.

Bronchoscopy is used to gather tissue specimens for bacteriologic or cellular study, to diagnose tumors, and to find and remove foreign objects from the lungs.

Tell Your Doctor If

- You have allergies to any medications or anesthetics.
- You are pregnant.
- You take medication.

How Long?

- Varies with patient.
- Procedure takes 30-60 minutes, but premedication and recovery also require time.

What Happens During Bronchoscopy?

- You will be asked to wear a gown. The physician, nurses, and/or technicians will be with you.
- During the procedure you will lie on a table with your head elevated, and your pulse and blood pressure will be checked. The room may be darkened.
- You may receive intravenous sedation to help you relax, and something to help prevent coughing.
- After local anesthetic is sprayed on the back of your throat, the bronchoscope is placed through your nose or mouth. Although it may feel like you can't breathe, your airways are not blocked and you will be able to breathe. If you need oxygen, it can be supplied through the bronchoscope.
- You will not be able to talk; however, you can use hand signals to communicate.
- You may experience some coughing, gagging, or medicinal taste at first, but these will subside.
- When the procedure is completed, you will rest until the sedation wears off.
- Afterwards, you may have a temporary sore throat.

Afterwards

- Don't eat or drink until numbness wears off usually 1-2 hours.
- If an outpatient, have someone drive you home.

Special Note

- Additional procedures may be needed.
- Complications are rare.
- If bloody sputum or painful breathing occurs, call your doctor.

Finding Out the Results

Your personal doctor will discuss your bronchoscopy results with you. Biopsy or cytology results are ready in one day; cultures, in 3 days to 6 weeks. Additional studies or treatment may be recommended. Since bronchoscopy is often the first step towards diagnosis, a negative bronchoscopy may still have to be followed by other tests.