

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 provider injects contrast dye into the bile system while x-rays are taken. X-rays allow the provider to view the bile system, gallbladder, liver, and the pancreas.
- An ERCP can identify diseases of the gallbladder, bile system, liver, and pancreas. Narrowing strictures or stones may be found in the bile system during this ERCP.

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 provider to remove stones, place stents, dilate strictures and take tissue samples.

How do I prepare for an ERCP?

- Be sure to follow the specific diet instructions given by your provider.
- 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.
- Tell your provider if you are allergic to iodine-containing drugs or IV contrast dye.
- Some people may need antibiotics.
- Be sure to let your provider know if you are pregnant before the day of the ERCP.
- Some of the medicines you take may need to be stopped temporarily before your ERCP.
 - **Blood thinners**
 - such as Coumadin (warfarin), Ticlid (ticlopidine hydrochloride), Agrylin (anagrelide), Xarelto (Rivaroxaban), Pradaxa (Dabigatran), Pletal (Cilostazol), Brillinta (Ticagrelor), Eliquis (Apixaban), Effient (Prasugrel), Plavix (Clopidogrel), and Aspirin. You must speak with your prescribing provider or the specialist at least 2 weeks before the scheduled ERCP. Do not stop these medications without the consent of your provider.
 - **Insulin and diabetes medications**
 - Please call the provider that monitors your glucose levels. Your medications may need to be adjusted due to the diet restrictions required for an ERCP. Do not stop these medications without the consent of your provider.

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 ERCP?

- Your provider will explain the risks and benefits of ERCP before the ERCP.
- You will sign a consent form for the ERCP.
- 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 provider will inject a contrast material (dye) into the bile system and x-rays will be taken.
- Depending on what the x-rays show, the provider will decide the best way to treat your problem or disease.

What can I expect after the ERCP?

- 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 ERCP.
- You might feel bloated or pass gas because of the air put in during the ERCP.
- What and when you can eat will be decided by your provider.
- If you are taking Coumadin, Plavix, or other blood thinners, ask your provider when to restart.
- Depending on your ERCP results, your provider 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 provider 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 provider's office with any questions or concerns.

References

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

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