

The investigation of urinary tract problems often requires visual examination of the bladder and its drainage system. This examination is called a cystoscopy.

Cystoscopy may be performed in your urologist's examination room or at your local hospital. The location, date and time of the cystoscopy will be specified so that you can make any necessary arrangements.

The examination

On the day of your examination you may be asked to undress and put on a gown. A nurse will ask you a few questions and explain the examination procedure. At the appropriate time, you will be taken to an Examination Room where you will lie down on a special bed. Your legs may be elevated and supported in stirrups.

Cystoscopy is performed using sterile technique. This means that care is taken to prevent any bacteria from entering the bladder and causing infection. Before the examination begins, an antiseptic solution is used to clean the genital area, which is then covered with a sterile sheet.

Local anesthetic – “freezing jelly” – may be applied to the urinary passage (urethra) to numb its lining. During the cystoscopy, you will be awake and may feel something, but any discomfort should be tolerable.

If additional tests are planned, your urologist may recommend that you receive an anesthetic. In these cases, another specialist doctor, the anesthesiologist, will explain how you will be kept comfortable with sedation or by being “put to sleep.” You will be asked not to eat or drink anything for a number of hours before your cystoscopy if an anesthetic is to be used.

Cystoscopy is performed by passing a narrow tube (the cystoscope) through the urinary opening, along the urethra into the bladder. It is important that you relax during the examination. The bladder is then filled with sterile water and special lenses are used to examine every part of its lining. The prostate and urethra are also examined, if appropriate.

The entire examination normally takes no more than a few minutes and you should be able to resume your usual activities immediately, unless an anesthetic is required. In this case, you will be monitored until your anesthetic has worn off completely. The use of an anesthetic requires that you arrange to be driven home due to its potential prolonged sedating effects. You should be able to resume all of your usual activities by the next day.

After the examination

After a cystoscopy, some patients may experience burning with urination and blood in the urine for a few days. These symptoms will disappear more quickly if you drink plenty of fluids and empty your bladder frequently.

Your urologist will discuss any findings immediately after completing your cystoscopy. You may be asked to make an appointment later to review all of your investigations and plan further tests or treatment as required. Medication may also be prescribed following your cystoscopy, if appropriate.

The male and female urinary tracts

