

# What to Know Before Your ERCP

## Carolyn Brooks, MD

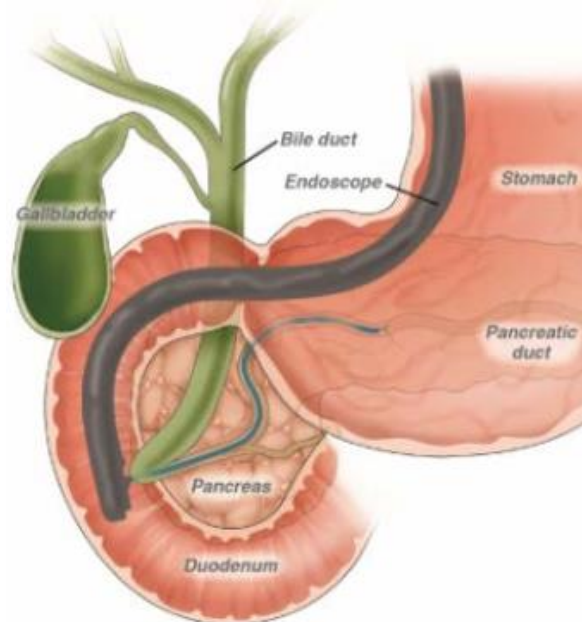
### What is an ERCP?

- Stands for *endoscopic retrograde cholangio-pancreatography*
- Used to visualize and treat problems in your bile ducts, pancreatic ducts, or gallbladder
- These "ducts" are tiny tubes that take digestive juices from your liver and pancreas to the small intestine
- Uses an endoscope (long, flexible tube with a camera at the end) and X-ray imaging techniques

### Why do I need an ERCP?

You may need an ERCP if you have any of the following:

- Gallstones trapped in the bile duct or pancreatic ducts
- Narrowing of your bile ducts or pancreatic ducts
- Jaundice: yellowing of your skin and the whites of your eyes
- Acute or chronic pancreatitis: inflammation of the pancreas that can cause severe abdominal pain and nausea/vomiting
- Infection of your gallbladder or bile duct
- A bile leak or fluid collection in the bile or pancreatic ducts



### What happens during an ERCP?

First, you will be given medicine to put you to sleep and keep you comfortable throughout the procedure – you shouldn't feel any of what happens next!

An endoscope (camera at the tip of a long tube) will go down your esophagus, past your stomach, into the first part of the small intestine – the duodenum

Once in the duodenum, your endoscopist will inject a dye into the ducts to better see any narrowing or blockages on X-ray

Your endoscopist can use their equipment to place stents to open narrow ducts, remove stones, or take a biopsy if there are any concerning masses

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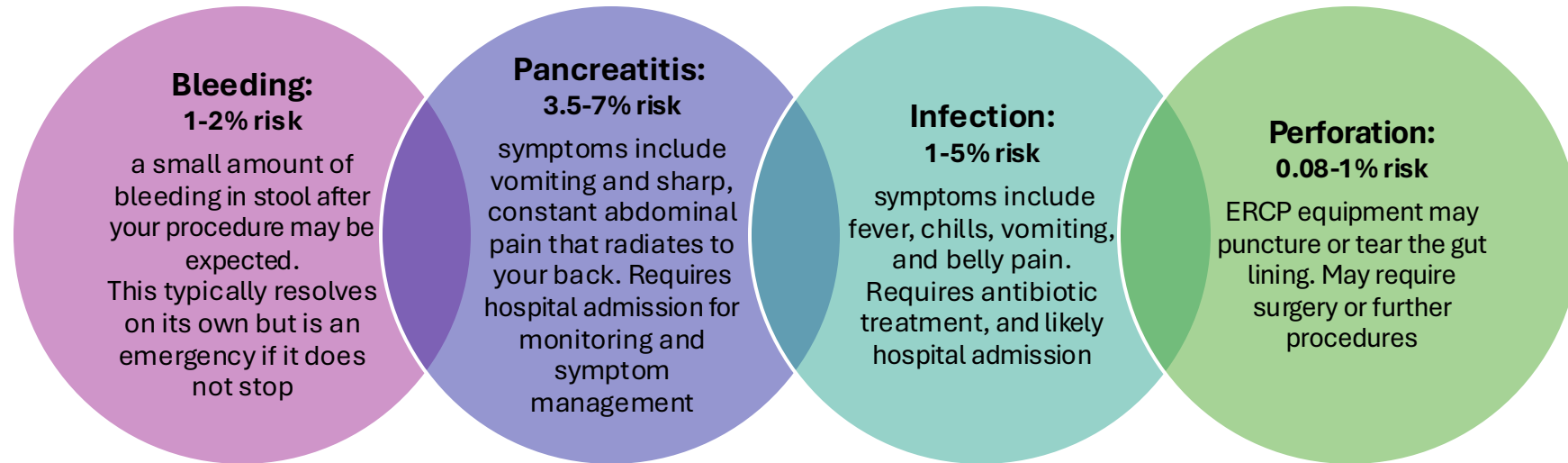
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### Before your procedure:

- Talk to your doctor about any medications you take that may need to be held before ERCP, particularly:
  - Blood thinners
  - Diabetes medications
- Also tell your doctor if you have ever had gastric bypass surgery, if you have a pacemaker or other implantable devices, or if you have an allergy to contrast
- Do not eat or drink after **midnight** the day before your procedure
- You cannot drive the whole day after getting sedation

### What are the risks of ERCP?

ERCP is generally well-tolerated. You may feel some belly discomfort, gas, or sore throat afterwards. Less likely complications include:



If you feel severe abdominal pain or bloating, uncontrollable nausea/vomiting, fever, shortness of breath, or persistent blood in vomit or stool after your ERCP, **call your doctor!**

#### References:

Image credit: Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography. AGA GI Patient Center.

<https://patient.gastro.org/endoscopic-retrograde-cholangiopancreatography-ercp>/<https://patient.gastro.org/endoscopic-retrograde-cholangiopancreatography-ercp/>

Image Credit: "Biliary Tree" MUSC Health. <https://muschealth.org/medical-services/ddc/patients/digestive-organs/biliary-tree>

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[Incidence Rates of Post-Ercep Complications: A Systematic Survey of Prospective Studies.](#)

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