

ERCP Information

What is ERCP?

Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) combines both endoscopy (use of a long tube with a light and camera at the tip) and x-rays, to examine the drainage tubes (ducts) of the liver, gallbladder and pancreas. It can diagnose and treat conditions including:

- Gallstones blocking the bile ducts
- Infection of the bile ducts and liver (cholangitis)
- Inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis)
- Narrowing of the bile duct (stricture)
- Treatment of complications following gallbladder operation (cholecystectomy)
- Cancer of the pancreas, bile ducts or ampulla

ERCP is a highly specialised and technical procedure and should only be performed by specifically trained and experienced specialists.

How is the ERCP procedure performed?

The ERCP procedure is performed in hospital, generally as a day procedure. Before the procedure, you will be given intravenous sedation/anaesthetic to put you to sleep. You will lie either on your left side or stomach. The instrument is then inserted through the mouth, and passed through the oesophagus, stomach and duodenum. The procedure takes approximately 30-45 minutes. Antibiotics may be given before or during the procedure.

What are the Risks of an ERCP?

ERCP is generally a well tolerated procedure when performed by an experienced and trained specialist. The most common complication is pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) which can occur on average in 5% of patients. If it occurs, it often requires the patient to stay in hospital until it resolves (typically 1-3 days). Other less common complications include bleeding, aspiration/anaesthetic complications, infection and tear (perforation) of the wall of the gastrointestinal tract. Occasionally, the procedure cannot be completed for anatomical reasons.

What is the Preparation for an ERCP?

You will need to fast for at least 6 hours prior to the procedure. Generally, you should take all your regular medications with a sip of water even in the morning of the procedure. If you are taking warfarin, clopidogrel or other blood thinning medications, please contact Victorian Gastroenterology (8677 7446) to discuss whether these should be ceased in the days before the procedure.

As the procedure is under sedation/anaesthesia, you will require a responsible adult to drive you home, and you should not stay alone that night.

