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

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

How do I prepare for an ERCP?
- You will be asked not to eat or drink after midnight the night before the test.
- 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.
- If you are taking Coumadin, Plavix or other blood thinners, let your doctor know before the day of the exam.
- Tell your doctor if you are allergic to iodine-containing drugs or IV contrast dye.
- Some people may need antibiotics.
- Be sure to let your doctor know if you are pregnant before the day of the exam.

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 test?
- Your doctor will explain the risks and benefits of ERCP before the test.
- You will sign a consent form for the test.
- 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 doctor will inject a contrast material (dye) into the bile system and x-rays will be taken.

Depending on what the x-rays show, the doctor will decide the best way to treat your problem or disease.

**What can I expect after the test?**

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

Reference:

- Understanding ERCP - The American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)
- Understanding Therapeutic ERCP – The American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)