

Failing to Prepare Is Preparing to Fail

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admin

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I'm spending this 105-degree Sunday afternoon throwing back a few cold ones. As much as I'd like to say I'm enjoying icy margaritas on this sweltering day, I'm spending the next few hours drinking 8 ounces of GaviLyte-C, a colon-cleansing "cocktail," every 15 minutes to prepare for my colonoscopy tomorrow morning.

I usually write my column on Monday before publication, but because I'll be sleeping off the anesthesia, I thought I should write it a day early while I'm coherent.

At the beginning of my Crohn's journey, I had a colonoscopy every two years. But when my father was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2012, my gastroenterologist became more cautious of my health and now schedules me to have a colonoscopy every year, along with an upper endoscopy every two years.

Call me strange, but I actually enjoy getting colonoscopies. When I was teaching full time, I would schedule the procedure for a few days after submitting students' final grades for the semester. After an entire academic year of long nights and weekends grading student work, I looked forward to the 30 minutes or so of heavy sedation. I would wake up feeling so relaxed that I would tell my husband it was the best sleep I got the entire year.

The colonoscopy itself is a breeze. I don't even mind drinking the gallon of medication that sends me running to the bathroom for hours on end. The most difficult part for me is meal planning for the three days prior to the procedure. Preparation protocol requires following a low-fiber diet for two days followed by more than 24 hours of a clear-liquid diet.

The list of allowed foods and foods to avoid is pretty lengthy. As someone who loves to cook and eat, I can't make many of the recipes in my repertoire because most of the ingredients are on the list of foods to avoid.

To complicate the matter, I have to monitor my daily intake of protein and potassium since experiencing acute renal failure leading up to my liver transplant. Before my transplant, I could eat foods like mashed potatoes, hamburger patties, and smoothies made with ingredients like bananas, yogurt, and melon during my colonoscopy prep days. Unfortunately, these and most of the other low-fiber foods on the list are also high in potassium or protein, which cuts my permitted food choices in half.

I've found that selecting a handful of the remaining items on the list and eating the same thing for two days is the easiest and safest solution. For the past two days, I've been living on cottage cheese, applesauce, biscuits and grape jelly, eggs, and plain turkey sandwiches. For the last solid food I could eat for 36 hours, I treated myself to some of my husband's french fries while I drooled over his plate of Thai sweet chili chicken wings.

After two days of eating the same thing, I look forward to day three of the prep when I'm restricted to a clear-liquid diet. A few years ago, I discovered that Ensure made clear protein drinks. I bought a pack, anticipating being able to drink something more filling than chicken broth. My heart sank when I opened the first bottle and discovered that although the liquid was clear, the berry-flavored beverage was red, a huge no-no on the prep list. That means I'm pretty much limited to coffee, tea, broth, jello, water, and juice.

The thought of drinking hot or even lukewarm broth isn't very appealing when the city is under a National Weather Service heat advisory. While I can eat lime and orange popsicles or jello, the idea of all that sugar makes my teeth hurt. I could probably handle living on my daily two cups of Earl Grey and 88 ounces of water for 24 hours. However, when I don't eat, my blood sugar drops, making me "hangry" and giving me a headache. To combat this, I've been mixing a little white grape juice with sparkling water to give me a boost throughout the day.

As I wrap up this column, I've finished my entire prep. It's almost midnight, and now I can't even have anything to drink until after my procedure tomorrow. I can sleep well knowing I've successfully completed my prep, and all systems are clear and ready to go. Only 366 more days — next year's a leap year — until I have to do this again.

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