

ERCP (Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography)

ERCP (Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography) enables a gastroenterologist to diagnose problems that involve the liver, gallbladder, bile ducts, and pancreas. An ERCP is a test that combines the use of a flexible, lighted scope (endoscope) with x-ray pictures to examine the tubes that drain the liver, gallbladder, and pancreas. Following intravenous sedation of the patient, a specialized endoscope is inserted through the mouth and gently passed down the throat into the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum until it reaches the point where the ducts from the pancreas (pancreatic ducts) and liver (bile ducts) drain into the duodenum.

This examination is done in an endoscopy center and typically takes between 30 and 60 minutes. ERCP can treat certain problems found during the test. If an abnormal growth is seen, an instrument can be inserted through the endoscope to obtain a sample of the tissue for further pathological testing (biopsy). If a gallstone is present in the drainage system of the liver, the gastroenterologist can remove the stone with instruments inserted through the endoscope. A narrowed bile duct can be opened by inserting a small plastic tube (called a stent) through the endoscope and into the narrowed bile duct. Moreover, visualization of the pancreatic ducts and bile duct by means of ERCP can frequently aid in the diagnosis and treatment of pancreatic cancer and bile duct cancer (known as cholangiocarcinoma).