**Procedure**

The gastrointestinal tract is a series of connected hollow organs, called the esophagus, stomach, duodenum, small intestine, colon, anus, appendix, and gallbladder.

When hollow organs are fixed, they tend to hold the shape in which they are fixed rigidly. Thus, a hollow viscus which has been fixed in the tubular shape will always snap back to the tubular shape if you try to flatten it. The same holds true for strips taken for microscopic sections. Once you cut them, they will snap back into the position in which they are fixed.

Therefore, when sampling a hollow viscus, always take the section with the organ positioned in the same way it was fixed. By this means, well-oriented, non-curled samples should result. Many hollow organs, especially those from the gastrointestinal tract, are best fixed by opening them, pinning them flat on a support board, such as a piece of Styrofoam, and then floating the board and the specimen upside down in a large container filled with formalin.

Many gastrointestinal specimens will be stapled shut at one or both margins of resection. These stapled ends will be impossible to sample for microscopic examination. Therefore, if it is necessary to evaluate the resection margins microscopically when the real margins are stapled, cut off the stapled edges as close to the staples as possible and sample the gut wall adjacent to the staples. Note this in the dictation, because such margins are not true margins, but are several mm away from the true margins.

If there is any question about the proper handling of a specimen, ask the staff gastrointestinal pathologists for help.**DO NOT RUIN A SPECIMEN IF YOU DO NOT KNOW HOW TO HANDLE IT CORRECTLY.**Sometimes, it may be necessary to request help from the surgeon in orienting a specimen properly.

**TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS OF HOLLOW ORGANS IS ADVISABLE** Many of these cases are reviewed at clinical-pathologic conferences. Other cases may have important teaching value. Ask the staff gastrointestinal pathologists for advice on composition of photographs if you are not sure. The best photographs are of the **unfixed**specimens.