The goal of a good to excellent prep is, with the existing products, achieved in about 75% of the cases. 

Picture from http://www.maringastro.com/preparation-websites/

Quote (and picture above left) from http://health.sunnybrook.ca/navigator/colonoscopy-preparation-options/:

**QUESTION:** I will soon be having a colonoscopy. I had one ten years ago. My doctor recommended the test to check for colon cancer. Now he says it’s time to do it again. I didn’t mind the procedure. But I hated drinking that horrible fluid beforehand to clean out my bowel. Why does that stuff taste so awful and is there an alternative?

**ANSWER:** Been there. Done that. And I know your pain. Most patients are sedated when that’s happening. Almost everyone who has had a colonoscopy — myself included — complains about the preparation.

The colonoscopy itself — in which a viewing scope is inserted in the rectum — isn’t all that bad. But there is no avoiding the dreaded prep. The colon needs to be as clean as a whistle before the doctor can insert the 5-foot long flexible scope into the colon. So you will need to purge your intestines. The standard preparation is sold under several different brand names including GoLytely, Colyte, Colyte and Klean-Prep. The kits usually consist of a container with a powdered mixture, to which you add four litres of water to form the solution. You then drink the concoction over a period of several hours on the day before your colonoscopy.

“The idea behind the preparation is that the large volume of fluid essentially washes out and cleanses the colon,” explains Dr. Michael Bernstein, a gastroenterologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

“It is not a pleasant experience,” acknowledges Annie Hui, a Sunnybrook pharmacist. “You will need to be at home where you have ready access to a bathroom. You are going to have watery bowel movements for hours — by the end of the prep, the rectal discharge will be clear fluid. Everything has been flushed out.”

Indeed, it’s a lot, a great whoosh going through your gastrointestinal passageway. Drinking four litres of fluid would be a challenge by itself. However, it’s the powdered mixture that provides the added burden of the awful taste.

One of the substances in the mixture is polyethylene glycol, which is sometimes used in small doses to treat constipation. It softens the stool and stimulates the movement of the muscles lining the colon, producing bowel movements. The vile taste arises from the second key component of the mixture — electrolytes such as sodium and potassium, which are minerals that normally circulate in the blood and help regulate everything from nerve conduction to heart function.