

Colon Polyps



What are colon polyps?

A polyp in the colon is any extra tissue that protrudes into the inside (or lumen) of the colon, which is part of the large intestine. Colon polyps vary in size from microscopic to several inches in diameter. Typically, patients do not have any symptoms unless the polyps are large; however, they may experience blood in the stool, constipation, or diarrhea.

Who gets colon polyps and why?

Polyps have a hereditary predisposition. If family members have polyps, healthcare providers strongly recommend that first-degree relatives (parents, siblings, children) have a colonoscopy at age 50 or earlier. Diet also plays a role in the development of polyps. People on low fiber, high fat, high meat diets are more likely to have colon polyps. Also, people in Western countries develop polyps more frequently than those from countries in the East.

By age 50, about one in four people get polyps, which is why it's the recommended age for screening with a colonoscopy. Polyps become more frequent with age and affect about half of people by age 70.

What are the effects and complications of colon polyps?

The greatest risk is that some types of colon polyps (primarily adenomas) may become cancerous. As adenomas grow in size, the chance of the growth eventually becoming malignant increases. Medical experts estimate that a small adenoma takes about seven years to become malignant. Hyperplastic polyps, which

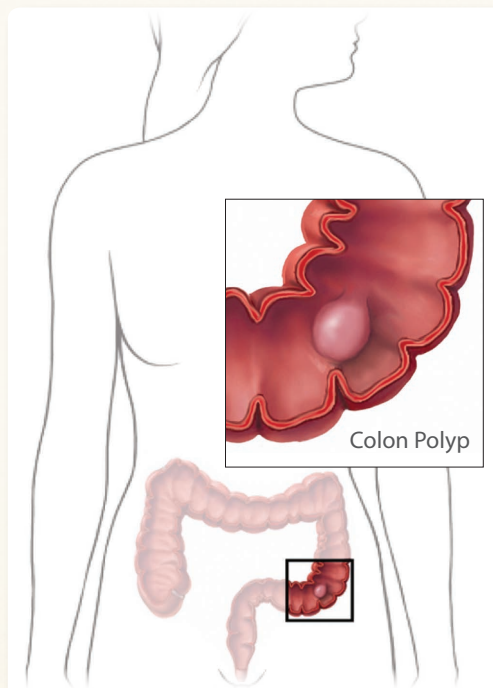
means they have grown, have essentially no malignant potential, although recent evidence shows that a similar appearing polyp (once thought to be simply a large hyperplastic polyp), called a sessile serrated adenoma, carries a risk for the development of colon cancer. Many other rare polyp types exist as well that are not associated with cancer risks.

How are polyps diagnosed at the lab?

Several tests are commonly used to diagnose colon polyps. During a digital rectal exam, a patient's healthcare provider feels for abnormalities in the lining of the rectum. A fecal occult blood test can detect tiny amounts of blood in the stool. During a

double contract barium enema, or lower GI series, the healthcare provider puts a liquid containing barium into the patient's rectum before taking X-rays of the large intestine. Barium coats the lining of the colon so polyps can be detected from the X-ray.

Healthcare providers also may examine the large intestine using a sigmoidoscope or colonoscope, a thin, flexible tube with a tiny video camera. Because different types of polyps cannot be reliably distinguished by looking at them with a colonoscope alone, a sample (biopsy) may be taken or a polyp may be removed for examination. The biopsy is then examined under a microscope by a surgical pathologist, preferably one with subspecialty training in gastrointestinal pathology, who can determine precisely the type of polyp and if any malignancy or other disease is evident.



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The image shows normal colonic glands at the bottom and the adenomatous glands at the top.



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Subspecialist pathologists at Inform Diagnostics review difficult and unusual cases together at a large multi-headed microscope to ensure the most accurate and definitive diagnoses.

The pathologist creates a pathology report with all the important findings, including critical information to help guide treatment and assess prognosis, which is sent back to the patient's healthcare provider.

How are polyps treated?

Most polyps can be removed completely and painlessly during a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy by inserting a surgical tool through the scope. The tool has an electrical wire loop that cuts through the tissue and stops any bleeding at the same time. This procedure is called a polypectomy. When polyps are very large, surgical removal may be necessary.

Several measures can help reduce the risk or incidence of polyps:

- Eating more fruits and vegetables and less fatty food
- Not smoking
- Avoiding alcohol
- Exercising every day
- Losing weight, if overweight

Learn more!

These resources provide more information about colon polyps and associated risks:

www.colonclub.com

This non-profit organization connects young adults diagnosed with colorectal cancer (CRC) and provides fun educational resources on the risk factors, genetic precursors, and symptoms.

www.fapgene.com

An online support community for people with Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP), a hereditary condition that causes adenomas.

www.uptodate.com/contents/colon-polyps-beyond-the-basics

Comprehensive patient education materials written by faculty from leading medical institutions.

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Inform Diagnostics continuously improves diagnostic precision through a unique consensus approach, rigorous quality assurance, comprehensive expertise, ongoing education and research, and close relationships with clinician clients.



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