

Understanding Polyps in the Colon and Rectum

What are Polyps of the Colon and Rectum?

Polyps of the colon and rectum, referred to as colorectal polyps, are abnormal growths that involve the lining of the colon and grow into the inside (or the tube) of the colon. They are very common and affect approximately 20% to 30% of American adults. Most polyps are not cancerous and categorized as either hyperplastic or adenomatous polyps. Hyperplastic polyps have no chance of becoming a cancer but adenomatous polyps, which are the more common type, can become a cancer, especially if they are large. However, the risk that a polyp will become a cancer is small, less than 1%. Cancer-containing polyps are also found, but these are less common than the non-cancerous polyps.

What Causes Colorectal Polyps?

Polyps can be caused by a number of different things. Age is a known factor in developing polyps, with the majority of polyps found in people over the age of 50. There are also a few rare polyp or colon cancer syndromes that run in families and cause polyps to occur at younger ages.

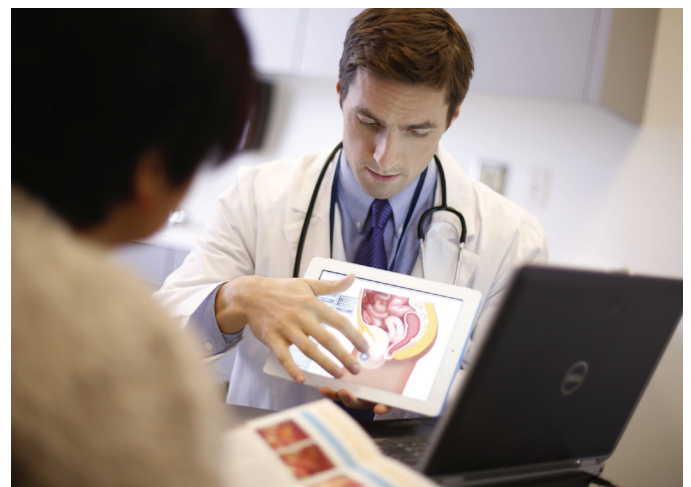
Some information suggests that certain lifestyle risk factors may cause polyps, which is important to understand because you have the power to change these causes. These include:

- A high-fat diet
- Eating a lot of red meat
- A low-fiber diet
- Tobacco smoking
- Obesity

The use of aspirin and a diet high in calcium may protect against developing colon cancer. However, you should talk with your doctor before taking aspirin or increasing your calcium intake to be sure that there are no increased risks to your health.

How are Colorectal Polyps Diagnosed?

Most of the time, colorectal polyps do not cause any symptoms but are found during a routine screening examination, such as a colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy. If they grow large enough they can cause symptoms including abdominal pain, change in bowel movements, blood in the stool, or excess mucous in the stool.



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How are Colorectal Polyps Treated?

Because there is the small chance that polyps can become cancerous, they are usually removed when they are found during a routine colonoscopy. Most of the time, polyps are removed using a snare, biopsy forceps, and/or by burning the base of the polyp with an electric current. Rarely, is surgery needed to remove a polyp.

After the polyp is removed, it can be sent to a pathologist who will look at it under a microscope to determine which type of polyp it is. If the polyp is cancerous, you will be referred to a specialist for treatment.

What is the Prognosis of Colorectal Polyps?

Once a polyp is removed, it rarely grows back. However, up to 30% of people who have had a polyp removed will develop a new polyp, so a repeat colonoscopy is usually recommended in three to five years. Your doctor will tell you which interval is best for you.

Your doctor may also recommend that you make the following lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of developing colon cancer:

- Eat a low-fat, high fiber diet
- Eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and calcium rich foods
- Maintain a normal body weight
- Stop smoking and limit excessive alcohol use

Where Can You Get More Information About Colorectal Polyps?

- **American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons**
<https://www.fascrs.org/patients>
- **National Library of Medicine**
https://medlineplus.gov/healthtopics_d.html
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/colon-polyps>
- **American College of Gastroenterology**
<http://patients.gi.org/topics/colon-polyps/>

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