

Care Gram

Colon Polyps

What Are Colon Polyps?

Colon polyps are growths that are found in the colon and other organs. These are most often shaped like a mushroom or a dome-like button and are found in the inside lining of the colon. The polyps may be as small as a pea or as large as a plum. Colon polyps start as benign (non-cancerous) tumors but may become malignant (cancerous) tumors over time. The larger polyps are more likely to contain cancer cells.

Why Do Colon Polyps Form?

Colon polyps tend to run in families (heredity). In some people, heredity and genes are the most important factors. For other people, diet and heredity are of equal importance.

How Are Colon Polyps and Cancer Detected?

Most people with colon polyps have no symptoms. A complete medical history is needed to identify your risk for colon polyps and cancer. Certain tests are performed to detect the presence of colon cancer and polyps. These tests may include:

- **Stool exams:** This can detect hidden blood. Colon cancers and large polyps shed tiny amounts of blood that can be found in this simple test.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** This is a visual exam of the rectum and lower colon using a lighted, flexible endoscope. It allows for the direct detection of polyps and tumors.
- **Colonoscopy:** This exam reviews the entire 5- to 6-foot-long colon. It is usually done under sedation. It is an excellent exam since polyps can be found and removed at the same time.
- **Barium enema:** This is an X-ray exam. Barium flows into the colon, and X-rays are taken, which can outline polyps. This exam cannot remove the polyps.

How Can I Prevent Colon Cancer?

Colon cancer is a serious disease that is easy to detect. The best way to diagnose and survive cancer is through early screening. Since most colon cancers start as polyps, such can usually be removed through a colonoscopy. Talk with your doctor about having this exam. Additionally, do not smoke and limit or avoid alcohol to reduce your chances of developing colon cancer.

Dietary Recommendations

- **Fruits and vegetables:** People who eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables are less likely to develop many cancers, including colon cancer. Consume five portions of colorful fruits and vegetables each day. Fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants that help rid the body of toxins.



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- **Red meats and saturated fat:** Saturated fats may be broken down by the body into cancer-causing substances (carcinogens). Saturated fat is found in many prepared foods such as pastries, sauces, and meats. There are many health benefits to reducing your intake of saturated fat.
- **Fiber:** Studies have shown that fiber, up to 25 grams a day, does not prevent colon cancer by itself. However, fiber is important to colon health.

How Are Colon Polyps Treated?

Most polyps can be removed during a colonoscopy by snipping them off with a special cutting tool or catching such in a noose (a looped wire that wraps around and squeezes the polyp to remove it). However, larger polyps may need to be removed later with another colonoscopy or surgery.

What Happens After the Polyps Are Removed?

Sometimes the polyps may return, and you may need a colonoscopy every few years. Your doctor will remove any polyps that may appear. If the removed polyps could become cancerous, your family members may also need to be checked for polyps and colon cancer.