

Colonic Polyps

A colon polyp is a growth on the surface of the colon, also called the large intestine. Sometimes, a person can have more than one colon polyp. Colon polyps can be raised or flat.

The large intestine is the long, hollow tube at the end of your digestive tract. The large intestine absorbs water from stool and changes it from a liquid to a solid. Stool is the waste that passes through the rectum and anus as a bowel movement.

You may also be more likely to get colon polyps if you;

- eat a lot of fatty foods
- smoke
- drink
- don't exercise
- weigh too much

Symptoms of Colonic Polyps

Most people with colon polyps do not have symptoms. Often, people don't know they have one until the doctor finds it during a regular check-up or while testing for something else.

But some people do have symptoms, such as:

- Bleeding from the anus. The anus is the opening at the end of the digestive tract where the stool leaves the body. You might notice blood on your underwear or on toilet paper after you have had a bowel movement.
- Constipation or diarrhoea that lasts more than a week.
- Blood in the stool. Blood can make stool look black or it can show up as red streak in the stool.

If you have any of these symptoms, see a doctor to find out what the problem is.

Colonic Polyps Investigated

The doctor can use one or more tests to check for colon polyps.

- Barium Enema – The doctor puts liquid called barium into your rectum before taking x-rays of your large intestine. Barium makes your intestine look white in the pictures. Polyps are dark, so they are easily seen.
- Rigid Sigmoidoscopy – With this test the doctor puts a thin, flexible tube into your rectum the tube is called a sigmoidoscope and it has a light in it. The doctor uses the sigmoidoscope to look at the last third of your large intestine.

- Colonoscopy – The doctor will give you medicine to sedate you during the colonoscopy. This test is like the sigmoidoscopy, but the doctor looks at the entire large intestine with a long, flexible tube with a camera that shows images on a TV screen. The tube has a tool that can remove polyps. The doctor usually removes polyps during colonoscopy.
- Computerised tomography (CT) scan – with this test, also called virtual colonoscopy, the doctor puts a thin, flexible tube into your rectum. A machine using x-rays and computers creates pictures of the large intestine that can be seen on a screen. The CT scan takes less time than a colonoscopy because polyps are not removed during the test. If the CT scan shows polyps, you will need a colonoscopy so they can be removed.
- Stool test - The doctor will ask you to bring a stool sample in a special cup the stool is tested in the laboratory for signs of cancer, such as DNA changes or blood.

Are colon polyps cancerous?

Some colon polyps are benign, which means they are not cancer. But some types of polyps may already be cancer or can become cancer. Flat polyps can be smaller and harder to see and are more likely to be cancer than raised polyps. Polyps can usually be removed during colonoscopy – the test used to check the colon polyps.

Who gets colon polyps?

Anyone can get colon polyps, but certain people are more likely to get them than others. You may have a greater chance of getting polyps if;

- you are 50 years of age or older
- you have had polyps before
- someone in your family has had polyps
- someone in your family has had cancer of the large intestine, also called colon cancer
- you have had uterine or ovarian cancer before age 50

Treatments for Colonic Polyps

In most cases, the doctor removes colon polyps during sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy. The polyps are then tested for cancer. If you have had colon polyps, the doctor will want you to get tested regularly in the future.

Who should get tested for colon polyps?

Talk with your doctor about getting tested for colon polyps if you are 50 years of age or older or earlier if you have symptoms or someone in your family has had polyps or colon cancer.

How can I prevent colon polyps?

Doctors do not know of one sure way to prevent colon polyps. But you might be able to lower your risk of getting them if you:

- eat more fruits and vegetables and less fatty food
- do not smoke
- avoid alcohol
- exercise most days of the week
- lose weight if you are overweight

Eating more calcium may also lower your risk of getting polyps. Some foods that are rich in calcium are milk, cheese, yogurt and broccoli. Taking a low dose Aspirin every day might help prevent polyps. Talk with your doctor before starting any medication.

Points to remember:

- A colon polyp is a growth on the surface of the colon, also called the large intestine.
- Colon polyps can be raised or flat.
- Some colon polyps are benign, which means they are not cancer.
- Some types of polyps may already be cancer or can become cancer. Flat polyps can be smaller and harder to see and are more likely to be cancer than raised polyps.
- Most people with colon polyps do not have symptoms.
- Symptoms may include constipation or diarrhoea for more than a week or blood on your underwear, on toilet paper or in your stool.
- Doctors remove most colon polyps and test them for cancer.
- Talk with your doctor about getting tested for colon polyps if you are 50 years of age or older or earlier if you have symptoms or someone in your family has had polyps or colon cancer.

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What are the next steps?

If you think you have this condition or any of these symptoms, you will need to seek medical advice.

If you have private medical care or wish to pay to see a consultant:

Take this factsheet along to your own GP and request a referral to one of our consultants.

For more information or to make an appointment:

Contact the Birmingham Bowel Clinic on 0845 241 7762 or email enquiries@birminghambowelclinic.co.uk.