

Colon Polyps

General Information

Polyps are extra tissue growth inside your body. One of the places polyps can grow is in the large intestine (colon).

Your colon is a long, hollow tube at the end of your digestive tract, where your body makes and stores stool.

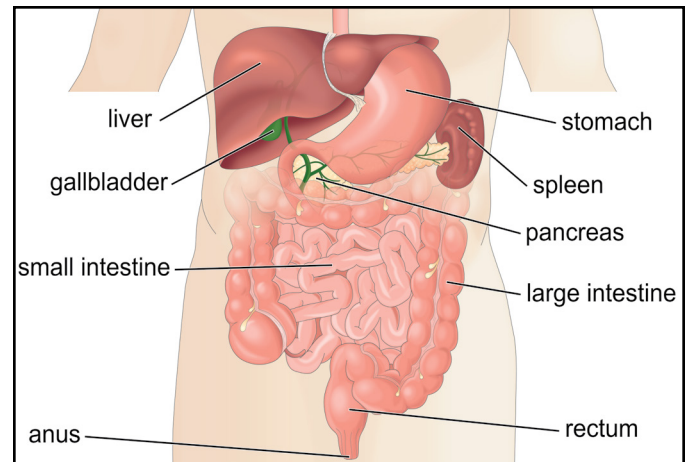
Most polyps are not cancerous (benign). Many times, polyps smaller than peas do not cause problems. Larger polyps may be cancer (malignant) or can turn into cancer.

Anyone can get polyps.

Who is at Risk

You are at a higher risk of getting colon polyps if you:

- are older than age 45
- had polyps before
- have a family history of polyps
- have a family history of cancer in the large intestine
- eat a lot of fatty foods
- smoke
- drink alcohol
- do not get regular exercise
- weigh too much.



© Allina Health System

Your colon is a long, hollow tube at the end of your digestive tract, where your body makes and stores stool. Polyps are extra tissue growth inside your body. They can grow in the large intestine (colon).

Symptoms

Often, small polyps cause no symptoms. Larger polyps can cause:

- bleeding from the anus (the end of the large intestine where stool leaves the body)
- constipation (hard stools that do not pass often) or diarrhea (loose stools that pass often) for more than a week
- blood in the stool.

Call your health care provider if you have any of the above symptoms.

(over)

What Your Health Care Provider Will Do

Your health care provider will do some or all of the following to confirm polyps:

- ask about your family history
- give you a rectal exam
 - Your provider puts on gloves to check your rectum, the last part of the colon. This is to check for polyps in the rectum only.
- take an X-ray of your colon
 - You will have barium (a thick, chalky liquid) put into your rectum before taking the X-rays.
- give you a sigmoidoscopy
 - Your provider puts a thin, flexible tube into your rectum. This sigmoidoscope has a light on the end of it which will help your health care provider see the last one-third of your colon.
- give you a colonoscopy
 - The provider uses a tiny camera with a light to look in your colon for polyps or cancer. You will receive a medicine to make you sleepy.
 - You will need to prepare for this procedure.

Treatment

Your health care provider will likely remove the polyp(s). This can be done during a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy. The provider may also remove the polyp(s) through surgery.

The polyp(s) will be tested for cancer.

How to Prevent Polyps

There are no sure ways to prevent getting colon polyps but you can lower your risk if you:

- eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and cut down on fatty foods
- eat foods rich in calcium (milk, cheese, broccoli) and folate (chickpeas, kidney beans, spinach)
- don't smoke
- don't drink too much alcohol
- get regular exercise (at least 30 minutes a day on most days)
- lose weight (if you need to).

If you have a personal or family history of polyps, colon cancer or both, your health care provider may want you to have regular screening.

Information adapted from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.