

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 out 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 factor. For other people, diet and heredity is of equal importance.

How Are Colon Polyps and Cancer Detected?

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. These 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. They cannot be removed by this exam.

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.
- **Calcium:** Calcium controls the growth of the cells that line the inside of the colon. People who intake the recommended daily allowance of calcium each day may have a lower risk of colon cancer. Calcium is found in milk, dairy products, vegetables, and some supplements.



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- **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 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 usually can be removed through a colonoscopy. Talk with your doctor about having this exam.