

What I Need to Know

About Colon Polyps

What is a Colon Polyp?

Polyps are growths on the lining of the colon.

Are Colon Polyps dangerous?

Most polyps are not dangerous if found on time. However, some polyps can grow into cancer if not found and removed. Doctors always remove all polyps and send them to pathology for testing. Most can be removed by colonoscopy. Few may require surgery.

What are the symptoms of Colon Polyps?

Most polyps do not cause any symptoms. Most are found during routine checkup. Occasionally patients may have bleeding from the anus, change in bowel habits or abdominal pain. However, what you need to remember is that most polyps do not cause any symptoms.

How common are Colon Polyps? What causes them?

The risk of having a polyp increases with age. At age 60 one in four patients have polyps. We do not know what causes polyps. We do know that genetic factors play a role (see next question).

What are the known risks of developing Colon Polyps?

The biggest risk factor for developing colon polyps is being older than 50. The risk increases if there is a family history of colon polyps or colon cancer.

Are there different types of Colon Polyps?

There are two common types: hyperplastic polyps and adenomatous. The hyperplastic polyps do not progress into cancer. However, the adenomatous polyp can sometimes progress into cancer and these are called precancerous. Few polyps, especially the large ones, may have cancer already growing in them.

After my colonoscopy I was told that I have Polyps. Now What?

Your doctor will inform you about the number and size of your polyps and whether they were removed. Most polyps can be removed during the colonoscopy. Your doctor will send the polyps to the pathologist for biopsy who is going to determine whether they are entirely benign, precancerous or cancerous. You will receive a letter from your doctor in about two weeks letting you know what the biopsy showed. In the letter your doctor will also let you know when you need to have your next colonoscopy to determine whether new polyps have developed.

If you are found to have precancerous (adenomatous) polyps it is very important to inform all of your first degree relatives (children, siblings, parents) who in turn need to let their doctor

know since they may also need to be checked depending on their age.