

## Colon Polyps and Cancer

A polyp is a growth that occurs in the colon and other organs, often shaped like a mushroom. Polyps can be as small as a pea or as large as a plum. Many polyps begin as benign tumors (non-cancerous), but in time can become malignant (cancerous). The larger the polyp, the more likely it is to contain cancer cells.

### ***Risk Factors for Developing Colon Polyps and Cancer***

- Family history of polyps and cancer, particularly colon cancer
  - Particularly siblings and parents
- Greater than 50 years old
- History of breast cancer
- Ulcerative colitis

### ***Types of Polyps***

- Ordinary
  - Primarily occur between 40-60 years of age. There are commonly only one or two present and they may take 10+ years or more to develop into cancer.
- Familial Polyposis
  - Hereditary condition where the entire colon is studded with hundreds of polyps. This begins at a very young age. Fortunately this condition is very uncommon.
- Lynch Syndrome
  - Hereditary condition in which cancer-containing polyps are more frequent among family members, siblings, aunts, uncles, etc.

### ***Detection***

Early detection of polyps and cancer is crucial and routine screenings are recommended. Depending on different conditions, recommended timing between screenings may vary. Colon polyps are usually found using one of the following methods:

- Medical history
- Sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- Barium enema

### ***Removal***

Polyps are removed to reduce the risk of future cancer development. Removal occurs during a colonoscopy using snares. Snares are wire loop tools that cauterize the polyps and remove the polyp completely. The polyps are then sent for biopsy.

### ***Prevention***

Consuming a diet high in fiber, 25-38 g per day, is the best prevention of colon polyps and cancer. Foods high in fiber include:

- Fruits and vegetables, particularly with skins (apples, peaches, grapes, peppers, carrots)
- Whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat breads, shredded wheat, bran flakes)
- Beans (pinto, black, kidney)
- Nuts

When consuming a high fiber diet, it is critical to drink plenty of fluids. Without fluids, constipation can be worse. At least 64 ounces of water per day are necessary, although more water is always recommended.