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Colon Polyps

Polyps are growths that form on the inside lining of the colon. They vary in size and shape. Some are mushroom in shape others are flat or carpet polyps. Colon polyps start out as benign tumors (not cancer), certain types can turn into cancer. There are polyps that do not place the patient at risk for colon cancer while others can form cancers. The adenomatous polyp, the serrated adenoma and the villous adenoma all have the potential to form cancer. Polyps are slow growing lesions. It may take five years or longer for a polyp to reach 1.5cm in size. It is thought that an additional five years or longer for this 1.5cm polyp to turn into a cancer although there are exceptions to this timeline.

Colon cancer is very common, occurring in over 150,000 people in the USA each year. More than 90% can be cured if the cancer is detected and removed at an early stage.

Colonoscopy can remove adenomatous polyps before they become cancerous!

The cause of polyps in many cases is unknown. In some cases heredity plays a key role. A person with a parent, brother, or sister with colon cancer (CRC) is at significant greater risk of developing cancer of the colon. The rate of CRC increases in people after the age of fifty as well as in people with inflammatory bowel disease. Hereditary Familial Polyposis and Lynch Syndrome are two disorders that are clearly linked to genetic defects.

Other factors contribute to polyp formation such as low fiber diets, smoking, lack of exercise and obesity. Diets should include up to 20 to 30gm of fiber per day. This could help prevent polyp formation. People who eat diets rich in fruits and vegetable seem to have a lower incidence of many cancers including colon cancer. Fiber supplements can be used to add fiber to the diet. Miller's wheat bran can be used to supplement fiber in the diet. Calcium supplementation may contribute to polyp prevention. Aspirin is probably effective in preventing polyp formation but not without risk. (See, Polyp Prevention)