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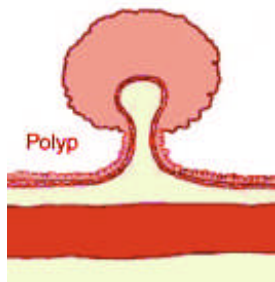
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What are Colon Polyps?

Polyps are abnormal growths, or tumors, that can occur in many locations in the body. Polyps are particularly common in the large intestine, also known as the colon, and occur much less frequently



in the stomach and small intestine.

When they first develop, colon polyps are benign, or noncancerous. However, if polyps remain undetected and are allowed to grow, a small but definite percentage will go on to develop cancer. If polyps are detected early and are removed, however, then cancer can be prevented before it has a chance to develop.

Unfortunately, colon polyps generally cause no symptoms, and are often discovered by accident. Polyps can occasionally cause rectal bleeding or diarrhea, but as a rule they do not cause abdominal pain, indigestion, or cramping unless they have become so large as to obstruct the intestine. Nearly all people with colon polyps are unaware that they have them.

The cause of polyps is unknown. There is a tendency for colon polyps and colon cancer to run in families, and close relatives of patients with colon polyps or cancer are urged to obtain careful medical screening so that any development of polyps can be detected early.

Aside from family history, additional factors which pose an increased risk for developing colon polyps and colon cancer include a history of cancer of the female organs, breast cancer, cigarette smoking, and a history of radiation therapy for prostate cancer.

Colon polyps occur equally in women as well as in men.

It is currently recommended that all persons of average risk for colon cancer



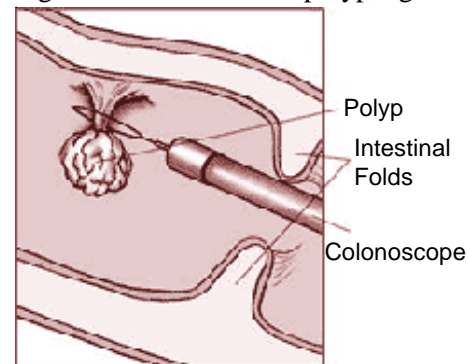
Polyp seen at colonoscopy

under a screening test of the colon beginning at age 50. Individuals at higher risk, or individuals who have experienced rectal bleeding, abdominal pain, a change in bowel habit, unexplained weight loss or unexplained iron-deficiency anemia should also be consid-

ered for colon screening.

Colonoscopy is currently the most accurate method of examining the colon to for the detection polyps and to search for causes of blood in the stool. Compared to currently available x-ray techniques, including "virtual colonoscopy," colonoscopy can detect more lesions and can remove polyps at the time of their discovery.

Polyps are removed by passing a wire loop through the colonoscope, passing it over the head of the polyp, tighten-



ing the wire around the polyp, and applying an electrical current that cuts the polyp away and cauterizes its blood vessels. Removing polyps using this technique is painless, as the lining of the colon has no sensation of pain. The removed polyp is sent for microscopic examination.

Patients who have had colon polyps may develop new polyps in the future. Such individuals should therefore undergo periodic colon screening.

Close relatives of individuals with polyps, for example brothers, sisters, parents and children aged 40 and over, should under colon screening.