

Bowel polyps

Bowel polyps are small growths in the large intestine (colon) or rectum.

Bowel polyps are common in adults. Up to 4 in 10 adults may have polyps. Polyps are more common in men and people age 50 and older.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Bowel polyps do not usually cause any symptoms. Most people with polyps do not know they have them. They grow inside you, so you cannot see them if you have them.

Some people may have a few polyps, others will have just one. Larger polyps can cause symptoms sometimes.

Doctors often find them when:

- they are checking your bowel for another reason
- you have a [colonoscopy after bowel cancer screening](#)

If they are found when you are having a colonoscopy, they are often removed at the same time.

Contact your GP if you have:

- a small amount of bleeding from your bottom or blood in your poo (rectal bleeding)
- diarrhoea or constipation that is unexplained
- pain in your tummy (abdominal pain) that is unexplained

Causes

Bowel polyps are caused by an abnormal growth (or production) of cells.

You may be more at risk of bowel polyps if:

- someone in your family has had bowel polyps or [bowel cancer](#)
- you have a condition that affects your gut, such as colitis or [Crohn's disease](#)

- you carry extra weight or smoke

Bowel cancer risk

Most polyps in your colon or rectum do not cause problems. But some may turn into cancer over time, usually many years.

Most bowel cancers develop from a type of polyp called adenomas. If these are not removed, there's a chance they may become cancerous.

Polyps are usually removed during a colonoscopy.

Treatment

There are a few ways to treat polyps.

Colonoscopy and polyp removal (polypectomy)

The most common way to treat polyps is to remove them when you are having a colonoscopy.

A flexible tube called a colonoscope is passed through your bottom and up into your bowel.

This is called a polypectomy and is completely painless.

Surgery

Polyps that are too large or that can't be removed safely during a colonoscopy are usually removed with an operation (surgery).

Checking polyps for cancer

After your doctor removes a polyp or polyps, they will send them for tests in a laboratory.

The laboratory will tell your consultant if there is any cancerous change in the polyp.

If there are cancer or precancerous cells in the polyp, your doctor will tell you if you need further treatment.

The treatment you need will depend on your case. Your doctor will talk to you about any next steps.

Monitoring bowel polyps

If you have had polyps removed, you may need a follow-up colonoscopy.

This can detect new polyps so that they are prevented from potentially developing into cancer in the future.

If you need a follow-up colonoscopy it will be 1, 3 or 5 years later. It depends on the type of polyp, size and number of polyps removed.

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