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Endoscopy

Gastrointestinal Medicine

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# The Centre for GI Health

## BOWEL POLYPS

Bowel polyps are small lumps or growths of tissue that arise from the lining of the large bowel (see figure on below) They are quite common and develop with ageing. Approximately 30 to 40% of people over the age of 60 years have a polyp. They can occur in any part of the large bowel but are more frequently formed in the left side of the large bowel. They may occur alone or be multiple.

Theories accounting for polyp development describe the role of inherited factors as well as influences from smoking and dietary factors, (foods implicated include fats, alcohol and processed meats). Diets high in fruit, vegetables and cereal fibres may help limit polyp formation.

Here are two main adenoma polyp varieties of clinical significance:

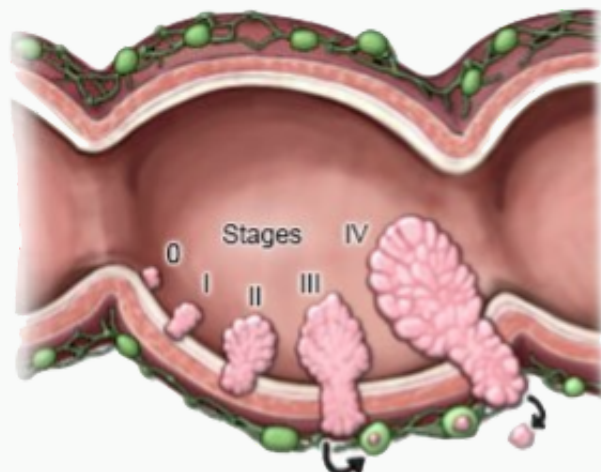
- Villous polyps, which have a broad base.
- Tubular polyps, which arise on a long stalk.

Other types of polyps such as inflammatory or hyperplastic polyps pose no threat of cancer.

In most cases, polyps are asymptomatic, however they may be associated with a discharge of mucus and blood from the rectum or a change in bowel habit. The majority and polyps cause no harm, but in about 5 to 10% of cases they slowly grow, and over years may develop into bowel cancer. For this reason, polyps are always removed during colonoscopy. This is done using a special wire snare. Taking away a polyp removes the risk of cancer at that site.

Once tubular or villous-type polyps have been identified and removed, a follow-up colonoscopy is recommended. The frequency of follow up will be suggested by your physician. New polyps will develop in about 30% of cases over time.

When large polyps are removed, it is not always possible to immediately tell if cancer is present. Laboratory assessment is required. Pathologists usually need two to three days to confirm the exact nature of such polyps.



Colon Polyps