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Colon Polyps and Colon Cancer

What are Colon Polyps and Colon Cancer?

A polyp is a growth that occurs in the colon, arising from its inner lining. Approximately 20-25% of all Americans will have a polyp by the age of 50 – and this risk increases with age. While the majority of polyps are benign, some are cancerous and will be removed if seen during a colonoscopy, significantly reducing the number of deaths related to Colon Cancer.

Symptoms

Polyps generally don't cause symptoms in their early stages. As they grow, they may cause bleeding. Over time some polyps may turn into colon cancer. As colon cancer progresses, it can lead to bleeding, change in bowel habits (constipation or diarrhea), narrowing of the stool, abdominal or rectal pain, or weight loss.

Diagnosis

- Physical exam- occasionally a mass may be noted on abdominal or rectal exam
- Labs- anemia or low iron may be seen on blood tests
- Stool tests- blood may be noted if the stool is sent for analysis
- Barium Enema- this is test in which contrast dye is injected in the rectum as x-rays are taken to visualize the lining of the colon.
- CT colonography- this is a newer technique used to examine the lining of the colon using a CT scan. It is limited because it may miss smaller colon polyps and if something is found, a regular colonoscopy is required to remove a polyp or obtain a biopsy.
- Colonoscopy- this is the "Gold standard" for detection of colon polyps and colon cancer. A flexible camera is inserted into the rectum and passed into the colon. If polyps or tumors are found, they can be biopsied or potentially removed.

Dietary Recommendations for Colon Polyps and Colon Cancer

This diet describes the dietary steps you can take to reduce your chance of getting colon cancer or polyps. While genetics is the main factor in the development of colon cancer, diet also plays a large role. Colon cancer and polyps are much more common in Western countries and the U.S. due to our intake of large amounts of red meat. Furthermore, our diet tends to be deficient in dietary fiber, fruits, and vegetables, which also contributes to the development of colon cancer.

A complete description of this diet can be found at [www. southerncalgi.com/diets](http://www.southerncalgi.com/diets)

Prevention & Treatment

Risk factors for Colon Cancer and Polyps include heredity, as having a parent with it more than doubles your risk. Colon Cancer is also less common in countries with high dietary fiber intake, so make sure your diet is not low in fiber. Nor should your diet be high in saturated fats – including red meat, sauces, and pastries. Calcium and folic acid supplementation may decrease the risk of Colon Cancer, as well. Finally, ensure your diet is rich in fruits and vegetables, as they contain antioxidants that may protect against Colon Cancer.

Colonoscopy screening is the best way to prevent Colon Cancer or diagnose it at an early age. Such should be considered in all people over the age of 50, and in younger patients if they have a family history of polyps. Aspirin can be considered in high-risk populations, as it may decrease risk as well.