

# Patient information

## Bowel polyps

You have been found to have a polyp in your bowel. This leaflet gives you information about polyps, and how we treat them.

### What are polyps?

Polyps are small growths of the inner lining of the colon or rectum (bowel). They may be a little bulge on the surface (sessile) or on a stalk (pedunculated). They are common, affecting 15 - 20% of the adult population. The vast majority of polyps are quite benign (harmless) but some polyps have the potential to become malignant (cancer). Fortunately, the process of change to become a cancer usually takes many years and most polyps never turn malignant. Nevertheless, because of the potential to become cancerous, polyps require removal. In this way it is hoped to prevent bowel cancer formation.

### What symptoms do polyps give?

Most polyps produce no symptoms at all because of their small size. Larger polyps may cause:

- Bleeding
- Mucous discharge
- Alteration in bowel function
- Abdominal pain

## How are polyps diagnosed?

Polyps are often found by chance when investigating the bowel for other reasons. They can be detected by barium enema X-ray or by direct examination of the lining of the colon and rectum with special instruments (eg sigmoidoscope or colonoscope).

## How are polyps removed?

Almost all polyps can be removed using a flexible instrument called a colonoscope which may be passed into the colon through the anus. The polyp can be cauterized or snared with a wire using electric current; this does not hurt. The polyp is then sent for analysis to determine its character. Larger polyps occasionally need more than one treatment for complete removal and a few require an operation. Removal of polyps with the colonoscope does carry a tiny risk of perforation or bleeding; this is a smaller risk than leaving the polyp.

## Follow-up

If your polyp is of a certain size or type you may be at risk of developing further polyps in the future. Thus you may need to have repeat examinations at intervals of 3 - 5 years and you will be entered into a surveillance programme. The aim of surveillance is to prevent cancer, and it is usually very effective. Nevertheless, no cancer prevention programme can be 100% and so if you have symptoms that concern you, such as bleeding or change in bowel function, then you should contact your doctor in the usual way.

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*<https://www.accessable.co.uk>*

