

# Colon Polyps: Detection and Prevention

## What are colon polyps?

A colon polyp is a small growth on the inner lining of the large intestine (colon). Most polyps are harmless, but over time, some can develop into colon cancer.

Because nearly all bowel cancer begins as a polyp, finding and removing them is the single most effective way to prevent cancer before it even starts.

## Are all polyps cancerous?

**No.** Most polyps never become cancerous. However, because many have the potential to turn into cancer if given enough time, these are removed at colonoscopy.

## What are the symptoms of colon polyps?

Most people with colon polyps do not have any symptoms at all, which is why they are often referred to as "silent" growths. However, if a polyp is large or located in a specific part of the colon, it may cause:

- **Rectal bleeding:** You might notice bright red blood on the toilet paper or in the bowl.
- **A change in bowel habits:** This includes persistent diarrhoea or constipation lasting more than a few weeks.
- **Abdominal discomfort:** Large polyps can occasionally cause cramping or pain.

## What are the different types of polyps?

The common types of polyps are:

- **Adenomatous Polyps:** These are the most common pre-cancerous growths. Removing them is a vital part of **colorectal cancer prevention**.
- **Serrated Polyps:** These can be harder to detect because they are often flat and are pre-cancerous by nature. They require high-definition endoscopy to identify, as they can progress to cancer through a different pathway than adenomas.
- **Hyperplastic Polyps:** These are generally small, harmless growths that typically are not cancerous. Small hyperplastic polyps are common especially in lower part of your bowel (closer to rectum).

## What causes colon polyps?

Polyps develop when the cells lining the colon grow and divide faster than they should. While the exact "trigger" isn't always known, it is usually a combination of factors:

- **Medical Factors:** Genetics, older age, and chronic inflammatory conditions (such as Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis).
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Diets high in red or processed meats, smoking, heavy alcohol consumption, and being overweight.

## How are colon polyps removed?

Most polyps can be safely and painlessly removed during colonoscopy. Once the polyp is identified, it is typically removed using a tiny wire-loop (snare) and 'snipped'. In some cases, small electrical current is used to cauterize the area to prevent bleeding. After removal, the polyp is retrieved and sent to laboratory to be checked for any signs of abnormal cells.

## What happens after a colon polyp is removed?

After a polyp is removed (polypectomy), the process at Canterbury Endoscopy & Gastroenterology follows three clear steps:

### 1. Lab Analysis (The Biopsy)

The removed polyp is sent to a pathology laboratory to be examined under a microscope. This determines the polyp's type and whether it was benign (harmless) or pre-cancerous (adenomatous).

### 2. Result Notification

It typically takes 1-2 weeks for the laboratory report to be returned. Your specialist will review the findings and notify both you and your GP explaining what was found.

### 3. The Surveillance Plan

Your specialist will recommend when your next check-up should occur. Depending on the size, number, and type of polyps removed, this interval is usually 3-5 years for most patients, or shorter interval especially if polyps were large or numerous.

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