

Rectal Polyps

A Practical Guide For Patients



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Introduction: Rectal Polyps

Rectal polyps are abnormal growths of tissue that form on the lining of the rectum. They are common and vary in size, shape, and type, with some being benign and others potentially developing into cancer over time. The two main types are adenomatous polyps (which may become cancerous) and hyperplastic polyps (usually non-cancerous). Symptoms of rectal polyps may include rectal bleeding, changes in bowel habits, or no symptoms at all. Regular screenings, such as colonoscopies, are crucial for detecting polyps early, as removal of certain polyps can prevent the development of colorectal cancer.

Key Takeaways

- Rectal polyps are abnormal tissue growths on the rectal lining, which may be benign or precancerous.
- The two main types are adenomatous (can become cancerous) and hyperplastic (usually non-cancerous) polyps.
- Common symptoms include rectal bleeding and changes in bowel habits, though some polyps may have no symptoms.
- Early detection through screenings like colonoscopies is essential for identifying and removing polyps before they turn cancerous.
- Regular screenings and polyp removal can significantly reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.



What Causes Rectal Polyps?

Known Causes:

- **Age:** The risk of developing rectal polyps increases with age, particularly after 50.
- **Family History:** A family history of colorectal cancer or polyps raises the risk.
- **Genetic Conditions:** Inherited conditions like familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) and Lynch syndrome increase the likelihood of developing polyps.
- **Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD):** Conditions like ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease can increase the risk of developing polyps in the rectum and colon.
- **Diet:** Diets high in red and processed meats and low in fiber may contribute to the development of polyps.
- **Smoking:** Long-term smoking increases the risk of developing colorectal polyps.
- **Obesity:** Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for developing rectal polyps.



Common Signs & Symptoms

Diagnosis of rectal polyps may involve a physical exam, review of symptoms, and tests such as colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy to view the rectum and colon. During the procedure, the provider can identify polyps, remove them, and send tissue for biopsy to check for abnormal or precancerous changes.

Core Symptoms Include:

- Rectal bleeding or blood in the stool
- Changes in bowel habits (diarrhea, constipation, or narrow stools)
- Abdominal discomfort or bloating
- A feeling of incomplete bowel evacuation
- Mucus discharge from the rectum
- Unexplained weight loss (in some cases)



Severe cases can also cause:

- Bowel obstruction, leading to nausea and vomiting
- Severe or continuous rectal bleeding, leading to anemia
- Chronic abdominal pain or cramping
- Intestinal perforation, leading to infection or peritonitis
- Unexplained weight loss and fatigue (if polyps progress to cancer)
- Spread of cancer to other organs (in cases of malignant polyps)



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Diagnosis of rectal polyps typically involves a physical examination and evaluation of symptoms such as rectal bleeding or changes in bowel habits. A colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy is used to directly visualize the rectum and colon and identify polyps. During the procedure, tissue samples (biopsy) may be taken to determine whether the polyps are benign, precancerous, or cancerous. In some cases, imaging tests may be used to assess the extent of colorectal involvement.

Diagnostic Tools:

- **Stool Tests:** May be used to detect hidden (occult) blood in the stool, which can indicate the presence of rectal polyps or other colorectal abnormalities.
- **Colonoscopy with Biopsy:** A flexible camera exam of the rectum and colon that allows direct visualization of polyps and removal of tissue samples to confirm whether they are benign, precancerous, or cancerous.
- **Imaging Tests:** CT scan or MRI may be used in certain cases to evaluate the colon and rectum for larger growths or complications.
- **Virtual Colonoscopy (CT Colonography):** A specialized imaging test that provides detailed views of the colon and rectum to help detect polyps without a traditional scope.



A diet for rectal polyps should focus on supporting colon health and reducing inflammation in the digestive tract. Emphasize a high-fiber diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes to promote regular bowel movements and reduce strain on the rectum. Include lean proteins and healthy fats while staying well-hydrated. Limit processed foods, red and processed meats, and excess alcohol, as these may increase colorectal irritation and long-term risk.

Key Insights:

- Rectal polyps are growths that develop on the lining of the rectum or colon and may be benign or precancerous.
- Early detection is important to prevent progression to colorectal cancer and to allow timely removal of polyps.
- Symptoms are often absent, but when present may include rectal bleeding, changes in bowel habits, or mucus in stool.
- Risk factors include age, family history of colorectal polyps or cancer, diet high in processed foods, and certain genetic conditions.
- Treatment typically involves removal of polyps during colonoscopy, with follow-up surveillance to prevent recurrence.



Medications & Treatment Options

Medications are not typically used to “treat” rectal polyps directly, as the primary treatment is removal during colonoscopy. However, in some cases, medications such as stool softeners or fiber supplements may be recommended to reduce straining and improve bowel regularity. If polyps are associated with inflammation or underlying conditions like inflammatory bowel disease, anti-inflammatory or disease-specific medications may be prescribed. In advanced or high-risk cases where polyps show precancerous or cancerous changes, surgical intervention may be required.

Treatment Options

- **Polypectomy (during colonoscopy):** The primary treatment where rectal polyps are removed using specialized tools during a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.
- **Surveillance Colonoscopy:** Regular follow-up procedures to monitor for new or recurring polyps, especially in high-risk patients.
- **Anti-inflammatory Medications (if applicable):** May be used if polyps are associated with conditions like inflammatory bowel disease.
- **Surgical Intervention:** Required in rare cases where polyps are large, numerous, or show precancerous or cancerous changes.
- **Symptom Management:** Fiber supplements, stool softeners, or dietary changes may be recommended to ease bowel movements and reduce rectal strain.



Advanced Therapies & Procedures

Advanced management of **rectal polyps** focuses on preventing progression and managing higher-risk or recurrent cases. This includes complete endoscopic polypectomy for removal of larger or multiple polyps and advanced endoscopic techniques such as endoscopic mucosal resection (EMR) or endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) for complex lesions. In cases where polyps show high-grade dysplasia or early cancer, surgical resection of the affected segment of the colon or rectum may be required. Genetic counseling and enhanced surveillance programs may be recommended for patients with hereditary polyp syndromes to reduce long-term colorectal cancer risk.

Therapy Options:

- **Endoscopic Polypectomy:** First-line treatment where rectal polyps are removed during colonoscopy to prevent progression to colorectal cancer.
- **Advanced Endoscopic Procedures:** Techniques such as EMR (endoscopic mucosal resection) or ESD (endoscopic submucosal dissection) are used for larger, flat, or complex polyps.
- **Surveillance Colonoscopy:** Regular follow-up exams to monitor for recurrence or development of new polyps, especially in high-risk patients.
- **Symptom Relief:** Management may include fiber supplements, stool softeners, and dietary changes to improve bowel regularity and reduce rectal irritation or bleeding.



Coping With Rectal Polyps

Coping with **rectal polyps** involves maintaining a healthy, high-fiber diet to support regular bowel movements and reduce strain during defecation. Following recommended surveillance **colonoscopy** schedules is important to detect and remove new or recurring polyps early. Staying physically active, staying hydrated, and avoiding excessive intake of processed foods.

Practical Strategies

- **Eat a High-Fiber Diet:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes to support healthy bowel movements and reduce strain on the rectum.
- **Manage Bowel Habits:** Avoid excessive straining during bowel movements and maintain regular bathroom routines to reduce rectal irritation.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Drink plenty of water daily to help soften stools and support smooth digestion.
- **Monitor Symptoms:** Attend regular follow-up colonoscopies and medical check-ups to detect and manage any new or recurring polyps early.
- **Emotional Support:** Seek support from healthcare providers or patient groups to manage anxiety related to diagnosis, treatment, or cancer risk concerns.



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Q1: What causes rectal polyps?

A: Rectal polyps develop due to abnormal growth of cells in the lining of the rectum, often influenced by age, genetics, diet, and chronic inflammation.

Q2: How are rectal polyps treated?

A: Treatment usually involves removal during a colonoscopy (polypectomy), along with lifestyle changes and regular follow-up screenings.

Q3: What are the early symptoms of rectal polyps?

A: Many rectal polyps cause no symptoms, but possible signs include rectal bleeding, changes in bowel habits, mucus in stool, and a feeling of incomplete evacuation.

Q4: Can rectal polyps be cured?

A: Yes, most rectal polyps can be completely removed, but ongoing monitoring is important because new polyps can develop over time.



Take Action

To manage **rectal polyps**, take action by following your healthcare provider's recommendations, including removal of polyps during colonoscopy and maintaining regular surveillance exams. Adopt a high-fiber, balanced diet to support healthy bowel movements, stay well-hydrated, and avoid excessive straining during defecation.

For additional resources, visit GastroDoxs.com.

**Your health starts with knowledge.
Take the first step today!**

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