



Polyps of the bowel and rectum

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Version 6

About this leaflet

The purpose of this leaflet is to tell you about Polyps of the Bowel and Rectum, their causes and treatments.

What is a polyp?

A polyp is a protrusion or bump on the lining of the large bowel caused by an abnormal production of cells. Polyps are common, occurring in 15-20% of the adult population. Most polyps are benign (non-cancerous). If left in the bowel for a long time (years), they can become cancerous.

Symptoms of polyps

Most people are unaware of having polyps. They are incidental findings on x-ray or colonoscopy. Sometimes, however, they do produce symptoms. Very rarely, polyps can cause abdominal pain or change of bowel habit. The most common symptoms are bleeding and mucous with the bowel motions.

Treatment

Since there is no foolproof way of predicting whether or not a polyp is or will become cancerous, total removal is advised. A very small number of polyps require surgical removal. If this is required, your consultant will discuss this with you. The vast majority can be removed during a colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy procedure. Polyp removal is not painful and is carried out using a snare or a wire loop, sometimes an electrical current will also be used.

Complications

For most patients, polyp removal is very straightforward. However, complications can sometimes occur.

- Bleeding (1 in 500).
- Perforation (hole in the bowel) (1 in 1000). For larger polyps, this can be as common as one in 25.

Over the next 24-72 hours

If you experience bleeding that is more than a half a cupful, pass a blood clot, have severe abdominal pain or fevers, please call 111. Make sure you have a copy of your colonoscopy report beside you or Alternatively you can attend your nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) department, remember to take a copy of your colonoscopy report with you.

Can polyps recur?

The chance of a polyp recurring is very small, (30% of patients). The chances of a polyp coming back or new polyps forming depends on the type of cells present in the polyp you have had removed. Based on the results of your colonoscopy / flexible sigmoidoscopy, your consultant will advise when you should have another procedure performed to remove any polyps that have formed or recurred.

Your GP or consultant can answer any other questions that you may have. You may have surveillance scope in a few years after polyps have been removed.

Contact

If you have any problems or questions, please contact the day unit via the switchboard on 0141 951 5000. The day unit operates Monday to Friday 7.30am to 8pm but please only telephone the unit between the hours of 8am and 7pm. Outwith these hours you should contact the Senior Nurse via the switchboard as well. If you have to visit your GP or your nearest hospital accident and emergency, please take a copy of your endoscopy report with you.

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