

What you need to know about polyps in your colon

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Perhaps one of the most dreaded parts of turning 50, is having to get a colonoscopy. While regular colon screening can be uncomfortable, Dr. John Kisiel, a Mayo Clinic gastroenterologist, says this screening is a crucial step in catching colorectal cancer and precancerous polyps early. Kisiel says polyps play a bigger role in colorectal cancer screening than

most people realize.

"Generally speaking, we encourage all adults 50 years and older—and even those who have at least 10 years of very high-quality life expectancy—to participate in screening," Kisiel says.

He says you might be surprised how often colonoscopies uncover polyps lurking in your colon.

"Precancerous polyps are extremely common," he says. "We expect to find them in more than a quarter of the colonoscopies that we do at a minimum. So, you know, maybe a third or even a half of all patients getting (a) colonoscopy will have precancerous polyps."

Although 1 in 20 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in his or her lifetime, Kisiel says having polyps does not necessarily mean you will get cancer.

"Of all the polyps that we see, only a minority will turn into cancer," he says. "Sometimes they just go away on their own, but removing polyps is thought to be one of the mechanisms by which we can prevent the formation of cancer in the first place."

That's why regular screening is so important.

The downside is that if a polyp is found in your colon, you may have to get screened more frequently. But that's certainly better than having to go through treatment for colorectal cancer.

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