

DEFINITION

1. **Polyps** are benign tumours arising from the epithelium of the bowel. They may be single or multiple (**polyposis**). They range in size from almost invisible bumps to lesions measuring 1-3 cm in diameter, which may be on a peduncle.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

2. Most polyps are asymptomatic. Larger polyps may bleed intermittently and can cause mild anaemia. Rare symptoms include obvious mucus production, altered bowel habit and abdominal pain. A large polyp may cause intussusception of the bowel, resulting in intestinal obstruction. Polyps of the rectum may prolapse on defaecation.

AETIOLOGY

3. In most cases it is unknown.
4. There is a much greater prevalence of polyps in Western countries compared with Africa, Asia and South America. It has been suggested that polyps may be associated with a diet rich in protein and fat and low in fibre. This may result in changed bacterial flora and the production of chemicals by bacterial action.
5. In some specific cases, genetic factors are responsible, for example in **familial adenomatous polyposis** and in the **Peutz-Jeghers syndrome** (mucocutaneous pigmentation with gastrointestinal polyposis).

CONCLUSION

6. **Polyps of the large bowel, rectum and anus** are benign tumours arising from the epithelium of the bowel. Their aetiology is unknown other than in certain specific types.

REFERENCE

Clark M L et al. Tumours of the Gastrointestinal Tract. In: (Eds) Weatherall D J, Ledingham J G G and Warrell D A. Oxford Textbook of Medicine. Oxford. Oxford Medical Pubs. 2nd Ed. 1987. p12.150-12.154.

December 1992