

Colonoscopies: Many need longer pause between screenings

By ACSH Staff — May 11, 2011

We here at ACSH have persistently advised Americans 50 years of age and older to have a colonoscopy at intervals recommended by the G.I. experts, and we have detected sub-optimal rates of these cancer-preventing procedures. Now, however — despite our perception that most people shirk colonoscopies altogether, a [new study](#) ^[1] published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* has actually found that too many Medicare patients undergo screening colonoscopies more frequently than the recommended seven-to-ten-year cycle. In a national sample of Medicare enrollees, researchers from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston identified over 24,000 average-risk patients whose screening colonoscopies were negative. Researchers found that over 46 percent of these patients underwent another examination in fewer than seven years. Moreover, 42 percent of these patients had no evident indication for the early repeat examinations.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross observes that these excessive examinations are both an economic drain and a source of unnecessary patient risk. "There's always the potential danger of procedural misadventure, such as a perforated colon or complications from anesthesia — although these are quite rare," he says, noting that the preparation is unpleasant for most people and can even prove dangerous for elderly patients whose fluid levels are unstable. "Even one serious complication is one too many if the procedure was not indicated," he added.

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