

## Colonoscopy may detect curable cancer in elderly: study

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Screening should be offered to healthy seniors who haven't been tested before, researchers say.

(HealthDay) -- Colonoscopies helped doctors detect a high rate of curable cancer in elderly people who had the screening for the first time, a new study indicates.

The findings suggest that screenings should be made available to otherwise healthy elderly people who have never been tested, Dr. Therese Kerwel, research fellow at Grand Rapids Medical Education Partners, and colleagues from Spectrum Health Medical Group in Grand Rapids, Mich., concluded.

For the study, the investigators examined information on 903 outpatient colonoscopies among elderly patients. Specifically, they investigated why these people, aged 76 to 85, underwent a colonoscopy and analyzed

the results of the screenings.

The study revealed that patients who had never had a colonoscopy before had a cancer rate of 9.4 percent, much higher than those who had had the procedure before.

The findings are scheduled for presentation Tuesday at the [Digestive Disease Week](#) meeting in San Diego.

All of the patients diagnosed with [colon cancer](#) underwent successful surgery, the researchers noted in a meeting news release. In each of these cases the cancers had not yet spread throughout the patients' bodies. The study authors said their findings underscore the importance of colonoscopies.

However, they noted, the use of [routine screening colonoscopy](#) in the elderly has become controversial since the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force determined in 2008 that the risks of the procedure outweigh the benefits in people aged 76 and older.

But, Kerwel said, "It is worthwhile to offer a [screening colonoscopy](#) for elderly patients in good health and functional status who have never previously undergone the test."

The data and conclusions of research presented at medical meetings should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

**More information:** The U.S. National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse has more about [colonoscopies](#).

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