

Regular colonoscopy can prevent bowel cancer

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Bowel cancer is one of the most common types of cancer. The prognosis depends greatly on the stage at which the tumour is discovered. Colonoscopy is regarded as the best method for identifying pre-cancerous changes. If these changes are treated promptly, the disease can be stopped in its tracks. To mark "International Bowel Cancer Month" in March 2015, experts at the MedUni Vienna are strongly recommending that all men should have a colonoscopy from the age of 45 and women from the age of 50.

In Austria, one in 17 people develop a malignant tumour of the colon at some stage in their lives. This means that up to 5,000 people a year face this diagnosis. Through the establishment of new surgical techniques and advances in drug treatment, the prognosis for this condition is improving tremendously.

Colonoscopy is a safe and gentle procedure

Monika Ferlitsch from the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Unit of the University Department of Internal Medicine III at the MedUni Vienna and Vienna General Hospital and also a member of the CCC (Comprehensive Cancer Center) says: "A large proportion of these cases could be prevented with [colonoscopy](#). It would enable the pre-stages of [bowel cancer](#), known as adenomas, to be discovered and even removed during the same procedure."

Colonoscopy is a low-risk screening method used to investigate the mucosal lining of the bowel. It is carried out using an endoscope, a tube-like specialist device with a video camera integrated into it that transfers the image of the inside of the bowel to a monitor for the endoscopy practitioner to see.

Better than other test methods

Ferlitsch: "We are focusing very much on the subject of [bowel screening](#). As a result, we are working intensively on the issue through a wide range of research projects. Of course, we are also investigating which screening method is the most economical and how it should be best used." Ferlitsch and her team have compared in a recent study, for example, colonoscopy with a [test](#) that looks for hidden blood in the stool (FOBT - Faecal Occult Blood Test, or Haemoccult test). "The results astonished us, since they showed that almost 37 per cent of men, even if their test was negative, had a higher risk of developing adenoma than women with a positive test," says Ferlitsch. The results therefore lead to the conclusion that gender is more predictive of the risk of developing bowel cancer than a positive FOBT test, making the test actually of zero value.

Well cared for in specialist practices

Colonoscopy is a screening investigation offered by many board-registered specialists. As a result, experts recommend visiting these specialist practices for this routine procedure instead of the hospital. Doing so shortens waiting times for the procedure, since hospitals such as the Vienna General Hospital priorities patients with acute emergencies.

More information: "Sex is a stronger predictor of colorectal adenoma

and advanced adenoma than fecal occult blood test". M Ferlitsch, G Heinze, P Salzl, M Britto-Arias, E Waldmann, K Reinhart, C Bannert, E Fasching, P Knoflach, W Weiss, M Trauner, A Ferlitsch *Med Oncol*. 2014 Sep;31(9):151. DOI: [10.1007/s12032-014-0151-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12032-014-0151-0)

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