

Low complication rates after screening colonoscopy

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During colonoscopy screening for bowel cancer and in the four weeks after the procedure, the risk for complications is low. This is the finding of a prospective cohort study conducted in the Saarland region, published in the current issue of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*.

Worldwide, [bowel cancer](#) is the most common cancer and the fourth most common cause of death in men and women. In Germany, [colonoscopy screening](#) as a service covered by the statutory health insurance schemes was introduced in October 2002. However, the associated routine documentation has registered only those [complications](#) that occurred immediately after the procedure (2.8/1000 colonoscopies). This may lead to an underestimation of the complications—ie, perforations and bleeds/hemorrhages—with delayed manifestation of symptoms.

In order to improve the body of data, the authors from the German Cancer Research Center and from the Saarland cancer registry collected data in 26 practices of 5,527 men (48 percent) and women (52 percent) who had undergone [colonoscopy](#) screening between 2010 and 2013. They were asked to report on complications during and within four weeks after the colonoscopy at a follow-up examination, using a questionnaire. 5,252 participants completed the questionnaire and were included in the study.

Forty-three participants reported experiencing complications. However, only a small proportion of self-reported complications was confirmed medically; on the other hand, most of those affected were unaware of

the bleeds/hemorrhages reported by their doctor. In total, 10 cases of bleeding/hemorrhage were confirmed by doctors, as were two cases of perforation during the colonoscopy, which in total equates to a medically confirmed [complication rate](#) of $20/5252=0.38$ percent. Complications almost exclusively affected participants in whom neoplasms had been detected and removed.

For the authors, the study results showed that the complication rate is low, even when carefully considering a four-week period after the colonoscopy. In participants without colorectal neoplasms who do not immediately benefit from colonoscopy screening, the rate of complications was found to be extremely low.

More information: Complication rates in colonoscopy screening for cancer: a prospective cohort study of complications arising during the procedure and in the ensuing four weeks. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt international*. [DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2017.0321](https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2017.0321)

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