

Title:

Screening Colonoscopy is Safe and Effective in Elderly Adults

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Abstract:

Colonoscopy is an effective tool for screening for colorectal cancer in adults over 75, and the rates of complications are similar to those for people under 65. In general, colonoscopy is recommended in adults with a life expectancy of five years or more.

Studies have found that screening colonoscopy in the very elderly (over 80) results in only 15% of the expected gain in life expectancy in younger patients, and in this population should only be performed with careful consideration to risks and benefits for that particular patient. Expert recommendation is to evaluate life expectancy, and only screen those with 5 or more years of life expectancy.

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# Screening Colonoscopy A Guide for Elderly Adults

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## **What is colonoscopy?**

A colonoscopy (koh-luh-NAH-skuh-pee) allows a doctor to look inside the entire large intestine. It allows the doctor to see things like inflamed tissue, abnormal growths, and ulcers. It is usually used to look for early signs of cancer in the colon and rectum. It is also used to look for causes of changes in bowel habits and to check on symptoms like belly pain, bleeding from the rectum, and weight loss.

## **What is screening?**

Screening is looking for cancer before a person has any symptoms. This can help find cancer early. When abnormal tissue or cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat. By the time symptoms appear, cancer may have started to spread.

## **What is colorectal cancer?**

Cancer of the colon or rectum is also called colorectal cancer. In the United States, it is the fourth most common cancer in men and women. When it is caught early, it is often curable. It is more common in people over 50, and the risk goes up with age.

## **What does a colonoscopy look for?**

A colonoscopy can help your doctor see:

- Colorectal Cancer
- Colonic Polyps - extra tissue growing in the colon that can become cancer
- Ulcerative colitis - ulcers of the colon and rectum
- Diverticulitis -infected pouches in the colon
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome - an uncomfortable problem causing cramping and other symptoms

## **Is colonoscopy risky at my age?**

There are some risks involved, including bowel perforation. Recent studies have shown that there is no more risk for adults over 65 than there is for adults under 65. Because not all people are the same, it is important to discuss your risks with your doctor. Even though the risk of something bad happening may be low, for people over 80, the benefits of finding cancer early may not be the same as with people younger than 80.