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Tumor-like growths called adenomatous polyps are the most common abnormality found during colonoscopy screening and have the potential to become cancerous. Previous research from these investigators showed that removal of these polyps prevented colorectal cancer but it was not known whether the cancers prevented were potentially lethal. This study assessed whether removal of adenomatous polyps reduced colorectal cancer mortality — a finding that would indicate that the polyps removed had the potential to progress and cause cancer death.

Researchers evaluated the long-term results of 2,602 patients enrolled in the National Polyp Study (NPS, the largest study of its kind) who had precancerous polyps removed during colonoscopy. They found that the detection and removal of these lesions resulted in a 53 percent reduction in colorectal cancer mortality compared to that of the deaths expected in the general population of comparable size, age, and gender. Furthermore, patients who had adenomatous polyps removed also had the same low death rate from colorectal cancer for up to 10 years after the procedure compared to a control group of people in whom no such polyps were detected.

“The magnitude of reduction in mortality seen after this procedure is likely due to high-quality colonoscopy performed by well-trained, experienced gastroenterologists,” said the study’s senior author Sidney J. Winawer, MD, a gastroenterologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering and Principal Investigator of the NPS. “Randomized controlled trials of screening colonoscopy in the general population underway in the US and Europe will in 10 to 15 years provide further evidence for this potentially powerful cancer prevention approach,” added Dr. Winawer, an internationally recognized leader in the prevention of digestive cancers who is credited with introducing colonoscopy as a key component of national guidelines for colorectal cancer screening in the United States and worldwide.

The [National Cancer Institute](#) estimates that in 2011 more than 100,000 new cases of [colon cancer](#) and almost 40,000 cases of rectal cancer were diagnosed, and that more than 49,000 people died from colon and rectal cancer combined.

The multi-institutional study included experts from various disciplines, including endoscopists, radiologists, pathologists, and epidemiologists. Researchers from the following institutions contributed to the study: Boston University School of Medicine (MA), Erasmus Medical Center (Netherlands), Minneapolis Veterans Administration (MN), Valley Presbyterian Hospital (CA), Cedars Sinai Medical Center (CA), Medical College of Wisconsin (WI), and Mount Sinai Medical Center (NY).

The work was supported by the [National Cancer Institute](#), The Society of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center Fund, the Tavel-Reznik Fund, and the Cantor Colon Cancer Fund.

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