

# Phone and mailed interventions significantly increase colorectal cancer screening rates

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A mailing or phone call to help patients get screened for colorectal cancer significantly increases their chances of actually getting tested, according to a study published in the January issue of *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention* by researchers at the Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson.

The research team, led by Ronald E. Myers, Ph.D., Professor and Director of Division of Population Science, Department of [Medical Oncology](#) at Thomas Jefferson University, performed a randomized, controlled trial of 945 people aged 50-79 to test the impact of a new, preference-based navigation intervention, as opposed to standard mailing or usual care, on screening rates.

A third of the patients received a "tailored" phone call to encourage them to perform their preferred screening test (colonoscopy vs. at-home blood [stool test](#)), plus a mailing of preferred information; another third were sent information on colonoscopy and a stool blood test kit; while the last third received no intervention.

Patients who received a phone call and/or mailing were almost three times as likely to undergo screening six months later compared to those who had no intervention. However, there was no significant difference between the phone and mailed interventions versus mailings only on screening rates.

While colorectal [cancer screening](#) rates are increasing in the United States, rates lag behind those for breast and [cervical cancer](#) screening. Screening and early detection of colon and rectal cancer holds tremendous promise for reducing the toll of colon and rectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of [cancer death](#) in this country with more than 140,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Late diagnoses will account for many of the colorectal

cancer related deaths.

The study, which was conducted between 2007 and 2011, included 10 primary care practices affiliated with the Christiana Care Health System in Delaware that used a comment [medical record system](#).

The research team searched for patients who had no prior diagnosis of colorectal neoplasia or inflammatory bowel diseases, had visited one of the participating practices within the previous two years, and were not compliant with American [Cancer Society colorectal cancer](#) screening guidelines.

For the study, 312 patients received a tailored intervention, where they were informed about both colonoscopy and blood stool tests and then were sent information on colonoscopy or the actual blood test performed, based on their preference. Another group, consisting of 316 patients, was mailed information about both colonoscopy and stool blood test performed. The remaining 317 were sent no information or tests and did not receive any phone calls.

Overall screening adherence at six months was significantly higher in both intervention groups compared to the control group, the researchers found. Thirty-eight percent of patients who received the tailored phone interventions and 33 percent of patients who received mailings completed screening tests. Only 12% of [patients](#) in the control group completed screening tests.

In terms of the intervention groups, the researchers found that preference-based navigation did not significantly boost overall adherence to a level that was significantly higher than that achieved by mail, but increased participant performance of their preferred screening test in comparison to the mailed intervention, especially colonoscopy use.

"The study showed that both strategies were superior to usual care, and that there is not a one-size fits all approach to screening," said Dr. Myers. "The next step is to determine if an intervention strategy that maximizes screening test access, incorporates patient preference, and engages providers can achieve higher [screening](#) rates compared to just mailings."

Provided by Thomas Jefferson University

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