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A new study has found that **women** can be **screened for colorectal cancer** at least five to 10 years later than men when undergoing an initial “virtual colonoscopy.” Published early online in CANCER, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings may help establish guidelines for the use of this screening technique, which is less invasive than a traditional colonoscopy.

Detecting precancerous polyps through the use of imaging techniques such as a traditional colonoscopy may prevent colorectal cancer. However, some people may feel that this technique is too invasive, while others may not be healthy enough to undergo the procedure. A possible alternative is the so- called virtual colonoscopy—a minimally invasive procedure with a very similar accuracy as traditional colonoscopy.

Unlike for traditional colonoscopies, though, no study has assessed at what age virtual colonoscopies should first be performed. To investigate, Cesare Hassan, MD, of the Nuovo Regina Margherita Hospital in Rome, Italy, and his colleagues studied 7,620 patients who were referred for a first-time screening with virtual colonoscopy from 2004 to 2011. A total of 276 patients (3.6 percent) were ultimately diagnosed with advanced cancer. Older age and male sex were linked with advanced disease, while body mass index

and a family history of cancer were not.

“We showed that the possibility for average-risk individuals to have clinically meaningful polyps detected by virtual colonoscopy is strictly associated with two main variables, namely age and sex,” said Dr. Hassan. The researchers determined that 51 women under 55 years of age would need to be screened to detect one case of advanced neoplasia, compared with only 10 men older than 65 years. “If you are a man, the best age to have a virtual colonoscopy is between 55 and 60 years, but if you are a woman, you can at least wait until 60 years,” said Dr. Hassan.