

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q: Can certain medical tests be overused?

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Choose your tests wisely. Many medical tests and interventions are unnecessary, potentially dangerous, and add to the high cost of health care. These services are not rooted in evidence-based medicine and can lead to other interventions that cause complications.

This year, 17 medical societies released a list of 90 common tests and procedures ordered on patients without symptoms that produced little benefits. This “choosing wisely” campaign cautions physicians and patients about the risks of these tests. A few examples follow, along with the society that recommended them:

- » Do not screen for ovarian cancer

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Question

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(CA-125 tests and ultrasounds) in asymptomatic women at average risk. (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists).

» Do not schedule elective inductions of labor before 39 weeks and not before 41 weeks if the cervix is unfavorable. (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists).

» Do not obtain imaging studies (CT, MRI, X-ray) in patients with nonspecific low back pain. (American College of Physicians).

» Do not automatically use CT scans to evaluate children's minor head injuries (American Academy of Pediatrics).

» Do not screen for carotid artery stenosis in asymptomatic adult patients. (American Academy of Family Physicians).

Consumer Reports is working with AARP, the Leapfrog Group, Wikipedia and others to spread the "Choosing Wisely" guidelines to patients. The rest of the guidelines are available on the initiative's website.

It is important that patients know the risks and benefits of all procedures and tests done.

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