

**GENETICS, GASTROENTEROLOGY, CANCER AND SCREENING FOR SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS:  
LATEST CHOOSING WISELY AUSTRALIA® RECOMMENDATIONS**

The latest recommendations from Australia's medical experts on the screening, testing and treatment of a range of common health conditions – including Alzheimer's disease, coeliac disease, breast cancer, prostate cancer and sexually transmitted infections - have today been released under the Choosing Wisely Australia® initiative.

The recommendations, developed by Australian medical societies and colleges, aim to guide important conversations between clinicians and their patients about the relevancy of particular tests, treatments and procedures. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality of healthcare for each individual and eliminate any unnecessary testing or therapies.

The Choosing Wisely Australia® initiative is health profession-led and facilitated by NPS MedicineWise. Speciality societies and colleges releasing lists today are the:

- Human Genetics Society of Australasia
- Gastroenterological Society of Australia
- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiology's Faculty of Radiation Oncology
- Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine

**Genetic testing**

The Human Genetics Society of Australasia (HGSA) says that with genetic information being made more widely available, their recommendations will assist both clinicians and patients with conversations about making wise choices related to genetic testing—ensuring safe, ethical and effective use of genetic information in healthcare.

Clinical Professor Jack Goldblatt from HGSA says, "Releasing our lists of recommendations today raises awareness of how unnecessary genetic testing can lead to further unnecessary investigations, worry, ethical, social and legal (like insurance) issues. In particular, we are cautioning people to not initiate testing on their own.

"Of increasing concern is the 'direct to consumer' genetic testing for MTHFR and APOE genes.

"MTHFR is an enzyme that converts folate. MTHFR variants are very common in the general population and folic acid supplementation has been shown to increase folate levels, regardless of MTHFR status. Having a variant in the gene does not generally cause health problems.

"APOE is considered a risk or susceptibility factor for Alzheimer's disease, but having a test only shows a probability, so people undertaking a test for APOE can also risk being falsely reassured.

"If the likelihood of improved outcomes from the use of a test for the gene is extremely low, then it should not be undertaken. Genetic tests are best performed in a clinical setting with the provision of personalised genetic counselling and professional interpretation of tests results, for patients to understand the further implications of the results."

**Gastroenterology**

Professor Anne Duggan from the Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA) says, "Our list of recommendations supports high-quality care for gastroenterology patients. One of the recommendations is to not undertake genetic testing for coeliac disease. As a coeliac gene can be found in one third of the population and a positive result does not make coeliac disease a certainty, serological testing is the appropriate first line screening tests for coeliac disease (this is done in a patient consuming an appropriate amount of gluten).

"Another of our focuses is on colonoscopy, an invasive procedure, with a small but not insignificant risk of complications. Our recommendation is to not repeat colonoscopies more often than recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines.

"Follow up intervals are recommended depending on the number and size of adenomas removed. Surveillance colonoscopies place a significant burden on endoscopy services, so surveillance should be targeted at those who are most likely to benefit at the minimum frequency required to provide adequate protection against the development of cancer. Colonoscopy can come with side effects including bleeding, tears, inflammation or infection."

### **Treatment of cancer – radiation oncology**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists' Faculty of Radiation Oncology (RANZCR) have released five recommendations today on whole-breast radiation therapy, management of low risk prostate cancer, bone metastases, brain radiation therapy and locoregional (recurrence of cancer cells at the site as the original tumour) therapy.

"Radiation treatment is a powerful weapon against cancer in its many manifestations, and cancer treatment consumes a large portion of healthcare expenditure. About one in every three Australians will develop cancer in their lifetime and over half will require radiation therapy as part of their treatment," Dr Dion Forstner, Dean of the Faculty of Radiation Oncology said.

"With the discovery of new treatments, the management of cancer has become more challenging and complex, and radiation treatment should be used within clinical decision making guidelines where they exist so it is appropriate and accountable. Patients and their families require information and conversations to ensure they can make wise health care decisions during cancer treatment.

"One of our recommendations relates to a medical situation where radiation oncology may not be immediately required. Management of low-risk prostate cancer should always involve discussing active surveillance first. Patients with prostate cancer have options including radiation therapy and surgery, as well as monitoring without therapy (so called active surveillance) in some cases. Patients are encouraged to discuss all possible options with their health care professionals including the providers of each type of treatment before making a treatment choice

"As well, whole-breast radiation therapy decreases local recurrence and improves survival of women with invasive breast cancer. Recent studies, however, have demonstrated equivalent tumour control and cosmetic outcome in specific patient populations with shorter courses of therapy (approximately 4 weeks). Patients, along with their radiation oncologists, should review these options to determine the most appropriate course of therapy," said Dr Forstner.

### **Sexual health medicine**

Sexual health medicine is the specialised area of practice concerned with healthy sexual relations. The Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine (AChSHM) connects and represents Sexual Health Medicine specialists in Australia and New Zealand.

President of AChSHM, Dr Graham Neilsen, says, "Many of our Choosing Wisely recommendations focus on screening and testing which is not generally helpful for people who have not experienced symptoms. Some of the tests we specify in our list can often be inaccurate and there are the potential harms of receiving false-positive results, which leads to social and emotional distress.

"One of our recommendations today points to the importance of good conversations between clinicians and patients on appropriate care. Many women with recurrent and persistent yeast infections (vulvovaginal candidiasis) self-administer, or are prescribed, topical and oral anti-fungal treatment. It is important to rule out other causes of vulvovaginal symptoms such as genital herpes or bacterial vaginosis (a very common cause of vaginal infection), so that other infections are not left untreated.

"As well as the importance of ruling out other causes before commencing anti-fungal agents, inappropriate use of antifungal drugs can lead to increased fungal resistance."

The full lists are available on the Choosing Wisely Australia website at [www.choosingwisely.org.au/recommendations](http://www.choosingwisely.org.au/recommendations).

### **ENDS**

#### **About HGSA**

The Human Genetics Society of Australasia is a professional society of 1000 members that promotes the practice of diagnostic and clinical genetics in Australia and New Zealand. The HGSA is a full member of the International Federation of Human Genetics Societies and the majority of members hold both a qualification and are employed in a position relevant to Human Genetics.

#### **About GESA**

The Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA) sets, promotes and continuously improves the standards of practice, training and research in gastroenterology and hepatology in Australia. GESA is the chief advocacy group for the healthcare professionals and scientists working in this field.

**About RANZCR Faculty of Radiation Oncology**

The Faculty of Radiation Oncology (RANZCR) is the peak bi-national body advancing patient care and the specialty of radiation oncology through setting of quality standards, producing excellent radiation oncology specialists, and driving research, innovation and collaboration in the treatment of cancer.

**About AChSHM**

The Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine (AChSHM) is a chapter of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Adult Medicine Division. Sexual health medicine is the specialised area of medical practice concerned with healthy sexual relations, including freedom from sexually transmissible infections (STIs), unplanned pregnancy, coercion and physical or psychological discomfort associated with sexuality. The practice of sexual health medicine encompasses two perspectives: a clinical perspective and a public health approach to sexual health problems.

**About Choosing Wisely**

Choosing Wisely Australia® is enabling clinicians, consumers and healthcare stakeholders to start important conversations about tests, treatments and procedures where evidence shows they provide no benefit and in some cases lead to harm. The campaign is being led by Australia's medical colleges and societies and is facilitated by NPS MedicineWise.

**About RACP EVOLVE**

The lists from HGSA, GESA and AChSHM are part of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians' EVOLVE program, a physician-led initiative to ensure the highest quality patient care through the identification and reduction of low-value practices and interventions. To find out more go to [www.evolve.edu.au](http://www.evolve.edu.au).

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