Benefits and harms of routine preoperative testing: comparative effectiveness

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Authors' objectives
Preoperative testing is used to guide the action plan for patients undergoing surgical and other procedures that require anesthesia and to predict potential postoperative complications. There is uncertainty whether routine or per-protocol testing in the absence of a specific indication prevents complications and improves outcomes, or whether it causes unnecessary delays, costs, and harms due to false-positive results.

Authors' conclusions
There is high strength of evidence that, for patients scheduled for cataract surgery, routine preoperative testing has no effect on total perioperative complications or procedure cancellation. There is insufficient evidence for all other procedures and insufficient evidence comparing routine and per-protocol testing. There is no evidence regarding quality of life or satisfaction, resource utilization, or harms of testing and no evidence regarding other factors that may affect the balance of benefits and harms. The findings of the cataract surgery studies are not reliably applicable to other patients undergoing other higher risk procedures. Except arguably for cataract surgery, numerous future adequately powered RCTs or well-conducted and analyzed observational comparative studies are needed to evaluate the benefits and harms of routine preoperative testing in specific groups of patients with different risk factors for surgical and anesthetic complications undergoing specific types of procedures and types of anesthesia.

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