

Family history of bowel cancer increases odds of survival

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A new study that combines genetic information on bowel cancer with NHS patient outcome data has found a link between family history of the disease and a better chance of survival, published in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

Cancer Research UK scientists, based at the University of Leeds, in collaboration with the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN), matched the [genetic data](#) of nearly 11,000 [bowel cancer](#) patients with data from the National Cancer Data Repository (NCDR) on treatment and survival.

And by tracking the survival of these bowel [cancer patients](#) they found that the 1,700 people (16 per cent) with a [family history](#) of the disease were 11 per cent less likely to die from bowel cancer within 5 years of

diagnosis than patients who had no family history of the disease.

The scientists believe the better prognosis for those with a family history may be linked to the fact that these patients were more likely to have right-sided tumours, that are biologically different to other tumour types, which may respond better to treatment.

Dr Eva Morris, a Cancer Research UK funded scientist at the University of Leeds, and lead author of the research, said: "Our study has found a relationship between family history of bowel cancer and a higher chance of survival.

"Although we haven't been able to determine exactly why this is the case, it does demonstrate how we can use data that we already routinely collect to help us develop a better understanding of bowel cancer and its [genetic causes](#).

"As datasets such as the NCDR expand and collect more detailed information this opens up the possibility of using this data to help develop better targeted treatments for patients, based upon their individual genetics."

Dr Julie Sharp, senior [science information](#) manager at Cancer Research UK, said: "This is another important step forward in our understanding of bowel cancer. Now we need to find out more about what's causing this difference. Studies like this, which link genetic data to detailed patient information, may help us develop a more personalised approach to treating cancer in the future.

"Survival from bowel cancer is best when it's diagnosed and treated in the early stages, so anyone who notices possible symptoms of the disease – blood in stools, or changes to bowel habits lasting longer than three weeks should get this checked out. If you think you may have a family

history of bowel cancer it's worth discussing this with your GP."

More information: Morris E et al, A retrospective observational study of the relationship between family history and survival from colorectal cancer (2013) *British Journal of Cancer*, [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2013.91](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2013.91)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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