

Can a simple handshake predict cancer survival rates?

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New acquaintances are often judged by their handshake. Research has now recognized the simple squeeze as an important diagnostic tool in assessing strength and quality of life among critical care patients.

In a study published in the journal, *Support Care Cancer*, Concordia professor Robert Kilgour and his colleagues at the McGill Nutrition and Performance Laboratory confirmed a link between handgrip strength and survival rates.

The test was simple: 203 patients fighting advanced-stage cancers squeezed a device known as a dynamometer with their [dominant hand](#). The instrument then measured peak [grip strength](#).

Because it requires minimal equipment, this method of evaluation is both portable and practical, says Kilgour: "This measure is one of several to categorize patients according to the severity of their disease. It can help determine interventions they may need, whether clinical, nutritional or functional."

While other diagnostic tests rely on a patient's self-reporting or examine related factors such as decreased body weight, the handgrip test directly focuses on body strength.

Its precision allows doctors to better assess a patient's decline.

Clinicians typically classify patients by percentiles; those in the bottom

10th percentile are in the most serious condition, while those in the 25th are somewhat stronger. In most cases, slowing a patient's decline and maintaining a decent quality of life can be a significant accomplishment.

Kilgour and his colleagues believe the grip test may help all categories of patients, especially those in the 25th percentile. At this stage, even modest interventions, like starting exercise or a diet change, can yield results, boosting both the physical and mental health of patients.

Provided by Concordia University

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