

Researchers closer to genetic risk test for bowel cancer

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In the near future, genetic screening for cancer risk may be a routine part of a visit to the doctor.

University of Melbourne researchers are working to unlock more genetic variants that could predict a person's risk of developing bowel cancer.

A new study, published in *Future Oncology*, and led by Professor Mark Jenkins at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health,

analysed 45 genetic variants that indicate an [increased risk](#) of bowel cancer.

Bowel cancer is the second most diagnosed cancer in Australia, and the third in the world. It is diagnosed in about 3,700 Victorians and over 12,500 Australians every year.

It is hoped this work will bring researchers closer to the development of a simple test, administered by a GP, to better pinpoint a person's [genetic risk](#).

This test could encourage further exploration to reveal pre-cancerous polyps before they become malignant.

"The pre-malignant polyps that contribute to cancer can be safely removed without surgery," Prof Jenkins said.

"So knowing where patients are in the spectrum of genetic risk could save lives."

Finding out more about the genes that carry a strong cancer risk would also make [bowel cancer](#) screening more targeted and efficient, he said.

"If we identify and measure enough genetic risk factors and test the population, we can identify those at high and low risk of the disease. We could also offer them screening appropriate to their risk.

"Potentially, in the future, this genetic testing could mean high risk people can begin screening when they are young, and low risk people can delay screening until a later age.

"People in the middle risk category could continue with standard screening which begins at age 50 years."

More information: Mark A Jenkins et al. Quantifying the utility of single nucleotide polymorphisms to guide colorectal cancer screening, *Future Oncology* (2016). [DOI: 10.2217/fon.15.303](https://doi.org/10.2217/fon.15.303)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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