

Don't waste the simple test that might save your life

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Research reveals many Australians aged 50 and over are putting their lives at risk by not taking part in a simple, painless bowel cancer screening test that is provided free and taken in the privacy of their own homes.

University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research Director Mark Jenkins said too few Australians take the [test](#).

"Bowel [cancer](#) is Australia's second-most commonly diagnosed cancer in males and females, with almost 17,000 new cases diagnosed in 2017," Professor Jenkins said.

"Each year more than one million Australians are doing this test, which can detect [bowel cancer](#) at an early treatable stage. Yet only 40 per cent of Australians who receive these kits, delivered by mail, complete the test."

Professor Jenkins, who is also Director of the Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics at University of Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, said test kits are sent to people aged between 50 and 74 every two years.

This test involves taking a tiny sample of faeces with a special collection stick, putting it in a sterile container and posting it back for testing.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program is designed to identify people who show early signs of the cancer while it is still treatable.

"This test is highly effective, clean, safe, non-invasive and can detect tiny invisible amounts of blood which are a sign that there may be early cancer. If blood is found in your samples, your doctor may recommend a further test to look for polyps or cancer before it spreads," Professor Jenkins said.

"Our research shows that carrying out this painless test can reduce risk of dying from [bowel](#) cancer by 74 per cent."

Professor Jenkins and his team have recently received substantial

funding from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) to renew the Colon Cancer Family Registry Cohort (CCFRC) for another five years.

The CCFRC is the world's largest resource for colorectal cancer study, investigating genetics and familial risk. This funding boost enables it to be run from Melbourne for another five years.

University of Melbourne Centre for Cancer Research genetic epidemiologist Dr. Aung Ko Win is analysing data from the CCFRC to develop new ways to identify which Australians are at highest risk of bowel cancer.

"By asking people about their family history of cancer, what they eat, how much they weigh, if they smoke, if they take regular aspirin as well as looking at their genetic data we hope to provide an individual risk of bowel cancer which will help target screening to those most at risk," Dr. Aung said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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