

## HEALTH

# Easy new test for colorectal cancer could save lives

By Nina Massey

A simple, cheap test can help identify who is at risk of developing colorectal cancer, research suggests.

Scientists say this could aid early diagnosis and potentially save lives.

The study found the faecal immunochemical test (FIT), which costs around £4, can pick up traces of blood in faeces.

Researchers said it performs well in patients with low-risk symptoms to quickly and accurately identify who should be referred for investigation.

Led by the University of Exeter, and supported by an alliance of British cancer care organisations and charities, the study examined data from almost 4,000 patients aged 50 and over.

The study, which was published in the *British Journal of Cancer*, involved all healthcare providers in the south-west of England.

Over six months, the test was given to anyone with low-risk symptoms of colorectal cancer – those that are also often caused by other things, including stomach aches, unexplained weight loss and anaemia. Before the FIT, there was no easy-to-do test for people with these symptoms.

Of 3,890 patients who received the FIT, 618 tested positive for blood in their faeces – 43 of whom had received a diagnosis of colorectal cancer within 12 months.

In the group that tested negative, only eight were diagnosed with colorectal cancer within a year.

Dr Sarah Bailey of the University of Exeter Medical School, who led the study, said: “Our findings are very exciting – we show that this simple and inexpensive test performs exceptionally well in this group of patients with low-risk symptoms.” Each year, 1.8m cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed globally, and the disease causes 900,000 deaths annually.

**900,000**

Colorectal cancer causes around 900,000 deaths worldwide each year

