

Screening trial confirms benefit of 'Bowel Scope' test

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A new trial of bowel cancer screening using flexible sigmoidoscopy – also known as Bowel Scope – has confirmed the benefits of adding the technique to existing screening programmes.

The study, run by researchers from Norway, showed that the number of [bowel cancer](#) deaths could be reduced by as much as 27 per cent if everyone over the age of 50 had Bowel Scope testing.

At the moment, NHS uses a [screening](#) test called the [fecal occult blood](#) test – which looks for telltale signs of bowel cancer in people's stools.

It is piloting the Bowel Scope test around England, with the aim of adding it to the bowel screening programme.

Bowel Scope screening uses a tiny camera attached to thin flexible tube to examine people's bowels.

Along with a camera, the tube also carries a thin 'grabbing' instrument that can remove growths called polyps that can develop into cancer.

Previous research has shown that this can prevent bowel cancer developing and reduce death rates.

The new study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, involved around 99,000 people.

Over 10,000 participants underwent two bowel scope tests over two years, with a follow-up 10 years later. A similar number of patients received the Bowel Scope and other tests that check for blood in stool samples.

A third, larger group of around 78,000 people received no tests.

Bowel cancer was diagnosed in 253 patients in the screening groups, compared with 1,086 in the untested group.

After an average of 11 years, 71 people from the screening group died of bowel cancer. In the group that underwent no screening, 330 died.

This was worked out as a rate per hundred people – the death rate was 27 per cent lower in the screening group compared to the control group.

Jessica Kirby, senior health information manager at Cancer Research UK, said the trial added to the evidence that [flexible sigmoidoscopy](#) can stop people from developing the disease.

"We're encouraged that Bowel Scope is being rolled out across England to be incorporated into the existing bowel screening programme. We urge the Government to ensure this roll out happens at pace so that patients can benefit from this new technology, and we can improve informed uptake of bowel screening," she said.

"We would also like to see the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland working towards implementing Bowel Scope screening, so that everyone in the UK can benefit from this breakthrough."

More than 41,600 people in the UK are diagnosed with bowel cancer each year, while just under 15,700 die from the disease.

More information: Holme, O., Løberg, M., Kalager, M., Bretthauer, M., Hernán, M., Aas, E., Eide, T., Skovlund, E., Schneede, J., Tveit, K., & Hoff, G. (2014). "Effect of Flexible Sigmoidoscopy Screening on Colorectal Cancer Incidence and Mortality" *JAMA*, 312 (6) [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2014.8266](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2014.8266)

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