

Trial to test for Barrett's oesophagus launches in GP surgeries across the UK

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

A Cancer Research UK-funded trial allowing GP surgeries to test for Barrett's oesophagus – a condition that can increase the risk of developing oesophageal cancer – launches in the UK today.

This trial aims to offer the Cytosponge [test](#), a less invasive way to test for changing oesophageal cells in patients with acid reflux symptoms, to up to 150 GP practices.

The researchers hope to assess whether the Cytosponge test will increase the number of Barrett's oesophagus diagnoses in primary care. They will also examine how cost effective the technique is and whether patients are prepared to take the test.

This is the last step required before it could be adopted into mainstream practice. The technique could streamline the patients referred for an endoscopy to those that need it.

The trial researchers are looking for GP surgeries across the UK to sign up and take part. The criteria for the trial mean that participants must be aged 50 and over and be on long-term acid-suppressant

medication.

The team aim to recruit nearly 9,000 patients to the trial. Half will receive the standard of care while the other half will be offered the Cytosponge test as well. Patients with a positive Cytosponge test result will also receive the standard endoscopy later to confirm the results of the Cytosponge test. At the end of the trial, 10 per cent of patients on both arms of the trial will be offered an endoscopy.

In the Cytosponge test, the patient swallows a capsule with a sponge inside, attached to a string. When it reaches the stomach, the capsule dissolves, exposing the sponge, which a nurse then pulls out. As it passes up the oesophagus, it collects cells from the lining for analysis. It can be uncomfortable but it's not painful and the test takes 5 minutes to perform.

While most patients diagnosed with Barrett's oesophagus won't develop [oesophageal cancer](#), understanding who is at increased risk could help to prevent oesophageal cancer, or diagnose the disease earlier when treatment is more likely to be successful.

Professor Rebecca Fitzgerald, lead author at the MRC Cancer Unit, University of Cambridge, said: "We're excited to see this being tried out in GP surgeries. It's a safe way to test for Barrett's oesophagus and we hope that this will make it easier for GPs to identify patients who have an increased risk of developing oesophageal cancer without having to refer them to hospital."

Dr Richard Roope, Cancer Research UK's GP expert, said: "GPs are always looking for new ways to ensure patients receive the best possible care. Trialling a new, less invasive technique to test for Barrett's oesophagus means that many [patients](#) each year could be saved from experiencing an endoscopy which can be uncomfortable. Around three in every 100 people with Barrett's

oesophagus go on to develop oesophageal [cancer](#) so techniques that help us to prevent or diagnose the disease earlier are vital."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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