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Scientists pinpoint faulty genes in new hope for testicular cancer test

By [Fiona Macrae](#)

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Genes behind testicular cancer have been pinpointed for the first time, paving the way for a test to identify those at high risk of developing the disease.

Scientists already knew that men with a close relative with the cancer are more likely to get it themselves.

But the breakthrough will hasten the development of a screening programme that could improve rates of early detection and prevention.



Hopes for a screen: The discoveries raise the prospect of a test for men whose father, brother or son has testicular cancer, to see if they are also at risk

There are 2,000 cases of testicular cancer a year in the UK and it is the most common form of the disease in men aged between 15 and 44.

Although men with a close family relative with the cancer were known to be more likely to develop it themselves, this is the first time the rogue genes have been identified.

The breakthrough, by British and American researchers, will hasten the development of a screening programme for those whose father, brother or sons have been struck by the disease.

Researcher Professor Mike Stratton, of the Institute of Cancer Research in London, said: 'By combining these genetic risk factors with other known risk factors it may be possible to in future identify men who are at high risk of developing testicular cancer, particularly those who have a brother or father already affected by the disease.

'This may allow early detection or prevention.'

Rates of the cancer have risen dramatically in recent years but it is 99 per cent curable if caught early.

The British researchers compared the genes of more than 700 testicular cancer patients with the DNA of healthy men.

This flagged up three rogue genes, with the most vicious raising the risk of the disease by as much as three-fold.

Inheriting all three quadruples the risk of testicular cancer, the journal Nature Genetics reports.

The researchers are now trying to recruit 3,000 men who have had the disease.

They hope to identify the bulk of the genes behind testicular cancer within three years, opening the door to the testing of men at risk and to the development of new drugs.

Dr Elizabeth Rapley, also of the ICR, said: 'By understanding the biology of this disease we hope to improve treatment options.'

'We are grateful to all those men who have participated in this study so far and would like anybody who has suffered testicular cancer to contact us, even if they were treated 20 years ago.'

'They could ultimately help us develop treatments and improve diagnostic techniques to improve the lives of sufferers in the future.'

In the US, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania hit on two of the same three genes in separate research.

They said: 'These variants are the first striking genetic risk factors found for this disease to date.'

Ed Yong, of Cancer Research UK, said: 'While more than 95 per cent of testicular cancer patients are successfully treated, finding genes that increase the risk of this cancer is important.'

'It tells us more about its basic biology and presents new opportunities to prevent, diagnose and treat the disease in those men most at risk – men aged under 50.'

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" .. more than 95 per cent of testicular cancer patients are successfully treated," Testicular, breast, colon, skin, lung ... ALL ... cancer is a whole body, systemic disease.

I knew that the "testicular cancer" misdiagnosis rate was high but not 95% : my thanks to CRUK for this information.

- Pat Rattigan, Chesterfield England, 01/6/2009 09:13

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