

Study points to telomere length as predictor of CC

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At the 57th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics, held from 23rd to 27th October, in San Diego, CA, scientists from Mayo Clinic reported that an abnormality of chromosomes long associated with diseases of ageing has, for the first time, been linked to colon cancer (CC) in people 50 years old and younger, an age group usually considered young for this disease. The finding may provide an early alert for younger patients with CC and could prompt new research into prevention and treatment of the disease.

The research team examined the DNA in blood samples of 114 CC patients 50 years old and younger and 98 people with no history of cancer. They found that the CC patients had abnormal telomeres that were unusually short, particularly for a group of patients considered young for the disease: patients in the study were about 15 years younger than the average age of patients with CC. In addition, CC in this younger group affected men more often than women.

The association between cancer and prematurely short telomeres raises the possibility of using telomere length as a biomarker of cancer or an early warning system that can alert physicians to pre-symptomatic cancerous changes. The scientists intend to look at other associations that shorten telomere length, including environmental factors, such as increased body mass index and smoking.

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