

# This vital test could predict stroke death

Let's highlight an amazing health breakthrough in the area of stroke. In a study published in the journal *BMJ Open*, researchers have devised a simple drawing test that can predict an older man's long-term risk of dying after a stroke. A reasonably important bit of health news, it would seem!



Despite treatment advances, stroke is still a leading cause of death and disability. We know that older age and impaired intellectual capacity (cognitive function) before a stroke are linked to higher risks of death and disability afterward.

However, the new study team wanted to see if there was a reliable way of finding out who might be most at risk of a stroke death, based on cognitive function.

Therefore, they analysed data from a long-term study that had been looking at different risk factors for heart disease and stroke in 2322 men since the age of 50. The sample for this study was about 1000 of these men. All had not been diagnosed with stroke and their intellectual capacity was assessed between the ages of 65 and 75.

This was done, using both the Trail Making Test (TMT) and the mini mental state exam (MMSE), which is widely used to test for dementia.

## The pencil test

In the TMT, you draw lines with a pencil between numbers and/or letters in ascending order, as quickly as possible. In the MMSE, you perform general cognitive tasks such as orientation, memory, and numeracy.

Over 14 years, 155 men had a first major or minor stroke. Just over half of them (84) died within an average of 2.5 years -

with 22 dying within a month of their stroke.

After taking account known risk factors, such as older age, high blood pressure, education, and social background, those who had performed badly in the TMT were more likely to have died.

Men whose scores were in the bottom 30% were around three times as likely to have died after their stroke as those who were in the highest 30%. No such association was seen in the MMSE test.

TMT is likely to pick up small cognitive impairments, caused by silent cerebrovascular disease that hadn't caused symptoms yet.

The TMT tests are readily available, according to the researchers. They may not only be tools for identifying risk of stroke, but also potential predictors of those who are more likely to die from the stroke.

For more information: <http://www.doctorshealthpress.com/general-health-2/this-vital-test-could-predict-stroke-death>.

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