There’s a big problem with tests like the ones 23andMe offers

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A new analysis of genetics-risk studies has come to the conclusion that, based on what we've seen so far, people aren't making many changes based on genetic testing results for risk of certain health concerns.

The study, [published Tuesday in BMJ](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.i1102), builds off an [earlier meta-analysis](http://www.cochrane.org/CD007275/COMMUN_does-communicating-dna-based-risk-estimates-motivate-people-to-change-their-behaviour) of genetics studies for risks related to smoking, diet, physical activity, and alcohol use.

Overall, it found that there was little to no effect of genetic-test results on the actions of those at risk for conditions like increased genetic risk of lung cancer among smokers, or diet changes based on obesity-risk genetic markers.

With new genetics tests that tell us everything from [how to work out](https://www.pathway.com/), to the [risk of developing cancer](https://getcolor.com/) later in life – and costs [falling fast](http://www.businessinsider.com/sure-genomics-genomic-sequencing-test-2016-2?utm_source=hearst&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=allverticals)– the push to use genetics to influence lifestyles has been strong. But these results suggest that the general public may still be a ways away from having their decisions informed by genetics.

For the study, researchers based at UK universities analyzed 18 studies that looked at genetic risks and the effect of knowing about those risks on behaviors like smoking, eating habits and working out. Risks included everything from increased chances of getting certain types of cancer, diabetes or cardiovascular conditions.

For the most part, they had a hard time finding trends in which significant lifestyle changes — like quitting smoking or eating healthier — were made in response to finding out the person had an increased risk for a disease.

But there were some limitations. For example, as Brian Zikmund-Fisher, an associate professor of Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan told the Genetic Expert News Service, the vast majority of people likely didn't have the specific kinds of variants that would require them to act on the information.

"The absence of effect shown in this meta-analysis is not surprising: the people most likely to act on genetic information are few in number and hence we tend not to find effects on average," he said. "Yet, the current lack of evidence is not proof that communication of genetic findings cannot influence patients."

"Instead, it simply suggests that communicating genetic risk will likely be very useful to a small subset of patients rather than moderately useful to everyone."

For now, it might be a little too soon to say that everyone will jump on the genetically-informed bandwagon.