**Antibiotics may have role in bowel cancer**

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The overuse of antibiotics could increase a persons risk of developing bowel cancer, suggests the findings of a US study.

Research published in medical journal Gut found extended use of antibiotics significantly increased the chance of polyp formation in the colon, a precursor of bowel cancer.

The findings add weight to emerging evidence that the type and diversity of bacteria in the gut may have a key role in the development of cancer, said the authors of the study.

Australian bowel cancer expert Associate Professor Graham Newstead AM, Head of the Colorectal Unit at the Prince of Wales Private Hospital and Director of Bowel Cancer Australia, says their’s some logic to the research which has "credence".

"We know already that if you take antibiotics you frequently get dioareha," said Assoc Prof Newstead.

This happen because the antibiotic kills some of the normal bacteria and you get an overgrowth of the abnormal bacteria in the gut.

But Assoc Prof Newstead said the study did not look at the effect of antibiotics on the colon, it is only epidemiological, and caution must be taken.

US researchers monitored the health of more than 120,000 nurses, aged between 30 and 55, who were part of the The Nurses Health Study launched in 1976.

Between 2004 and 2010, there were 1194 abnormal growths in the colon and rectum diagnosed.

Those who had taken antibiotics for two months or more between the ages of 20 and 39 were 36 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with an adenoma, or polyp, compared with those who had not taken antibiotics for any extended period in their twenties and thirties.

Similarly, women who had taken antibiotics for two months or more during their forties and fifties were 69 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with an adenoma.

And those who had taken these drugs for 15 days or more between the ages of 20 and 39, and between the ages of 40 and 59, were 73 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with an adenoma.

"It does seem to indicate that people who have too many antibiotics might be at more risk of of getting polyps than people who have less of them," said Assoc Prof Newstead.

"And, remembering that not all polyps turn to cancer but the cancer comes from the polyps. If you have more polyps or tendency to get polyps then maybe you are slightly more risk of getting cancer," he added.

The message to be taken from the study is not to use antibiotics for a ‘tickle’ in the throat or a cold, said Prof Newstead.