**Thousands of patients could be having unnecessary open heart surgery that costs NHS £60m a year**

A study shows that a test used to determine whether patients need surgery only has a 60% accuracy rate, suggesting many are sent for surgery prematurely

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Thousands of patients could be having unnecessary heart surgery because of a "highly inaccurate" test, experts have warned.

Needless open heart operations because of the approved exercise test may be costing the [**NHS**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/nhs) £60million a year, it is claimed.

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Exercise testing has been used to assess people with the heart valve condition aortic stenosis (AS) since 2012.

Patients are asked pedal a stationary bike to see if they require surgery to correct the problem, caused by a narrowing of the aortic valve opening.

But a study published in the European Heart Journal shows that the test only has a 60% accuracy rate, suggesting many patients are sent for surgery prematurely.

Each year in the UK about 10,000 aortic valve replacements are carried out at a cost of up to £15,000 per procedure.

According to the new findings, roughly 40% of these operations may be unnecessary.

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Prof Gerry McCann, of the University of Leicester's Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, who led the study of 174 patients, said: "There is no doubt that valve replacement therapy is highly effective for patients with symptoms, however there are risks involved.

"It's a major operation and there's a 1% chance of people dying or having a [**stroke**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/stroke) during or after. There's also the chance they could develop an infection.

**Unnecessary heart ops could be costing the NHS millions** (Photo: Getty)

"It can often take six months to recover, but if they survive they tend to do very well afterwards.

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"However, if we know a patient has AS and no symptoms and we do nothing, there's also a 1% chance they will die, so there's a fine line between whether we should intervene or not.

"Our findings showed that this exercise test, which has been approved by the American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology and the European Society of Cardiology, was highly inaccurate as almost twice the number of people who became breathless during the test did not develop symptoms within a year."

Prof McCann plans to search for a more accurate way of deciding which patients with AS should undergo surgery.

A clinical study comparing early surgery with waiting for symptoms to develop is needed, he said.