Researchers Close to Developing a Chewing Gum That Detects Cancer

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Here's some sweet news: Researchers are developing a chewing gum that may be able to detect whether a person has cancer, Fox News reports.

The cancer-detecting gum is under development at Alabama biotech company Volatile Analysis and works by absorbing volatile organic compounds, or volatiles, in the mouth that the body produces when a person has cancer. Doctors can analyze the chewed gum for the presence of volatiles; since these compounds are unique to each type of cancer, they can also identify which form of the disease an individual has.

The firm's researchers said they chose gum because it can remain in the mouth for an extended period and is durable enough to withstand medical testing. Using the gum as a diagnostic tool means individuals would no longer need to undergo blood tests, biopsies or other invasive procedures to determine their cancer risk.

"Over the last 15 years, there have been a lot of attempts with different products and processes for early detection of cancer," said Leonard Lichtenfeld, MD, deputy chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society, in a recent comment about the new technology.

For instance, scientists have looked at breath samples, urine samples and even dogs that might be able to smell cancer. "None of these efforts are proven to detect cancer early," Lichtenfeld added.

The gum is still being tested, so it may be too early to determine how well it will work in practice. But Volatile Analysis said it hopes to make the gum available to doctors and patients as soon as next year. Researchers also promised that the gum would come in flavors that taste just like candy — which would make cancer testing a little more palatable for many people.

Click here to learn more about the warning signs of cancer.

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