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Eye test may be window to brain

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AUSTRALIAN scientists report encouraging early results from an eye test they hope will give them a simple way to detect signs of Alzheimer's disease.

The test is experimental, but doctors know Alzheimer's causes changes in the eyes, not just the brain. Other re-

searchers in the US also are working on an eye test for the disease.

"It's a small study," but "suggestive and encouraging", one of the American researchers, Dr. Lee Goldstein of Boston University, said of the Australian work.

"My hat's off to them for looking outside the brain for other areas where we might see evidence of this disease."

Shaun Frost from the

CSIRO discussed the test yesterday at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in France.

More than 5.4 million Americans and 35 million people worldwide have Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia.

Brain scans can find evidence of it a decade or more before it causes memory and thinking problems, but they are

too expensive and impractical for routine use.

Doctors and families need easier ways to tell who is developing the disease.

The eye test involves photographing blood vessels in the retina.

Researchers found certain blood vessels differed in width in those with Alzheimer's from the blood vessels in healthy people.