

The number of middle-aged people dying of cancer in the UK is falling

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Middle-aged are surviving cancer

The number of middle-aged people dying of cancer in the UK is falling.

A survey has shown that death rates from cancer have fallen over the last decade, even though the number of cancer diagnoses has remained steady.

Lung, breast, bowel and prostate cancer remained the most prevalent forms of the disease, but there has been a significant rise in rarer cancers.

The findings were revealed at the Britain Against Cancer (Bacup) conference in London.

Experts say better detection of cancers in their early stages, and improved treatments are key factors.

The analysis, which focused on people aged between 35 and 69, found the death rate fell by 2.4% each year over the last decade.

One of the biggest killers used to be stomach cancer, but rates have fallen by 39% in men and 45% in women.

The decrease was largely put down to changes in food preservation and the use of antibiotics.

Bowel cancer deaths over the last 10 years fell by 22% for men and 26% among women.

The number of women dying from breast cancer fell by a quarter – even though the number of people suffering the disease rose.

There was also a fall in the number of both men and women being diagnosed with lung cancer. Previously a fall had only been seen amongst men.

Mouth cancer increase

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Professor David Forman, a researcher for Cancer Research UK at the University of Leeds and chairman of the UK Association of Cancer Registries (UKACR), was in charge of the analysis.

He said: "The statistics confirm that the current four major cancers – lung, breast, bowel and prostate – will continue to dominate in the future.

"They also show that thousands fewer people are dying of cancer every year.

"The global cancer research effort has led to many important gains.

"There will be little change in how cancers are ranked at the top of the incidence table.

"But it also emerges that cancers that have previously received less attention – such as cancers of the mouth and malignant melanoma – are likely to become more prominent in the future."

The study found that the incidence of mouth cancer increased by 23% in men and 24% in women, while the number of skin melanomas diagnosed rose by 35% in men and 22% in women.

Incidence of prostate cancer have more than doubled in 10 years, mainly because of the improvements in screening.

But mortality and incidence rates of cervical cancer have both dropped by a third, largely due to effective screening and pre-cancerous treatment.

Professor John Toy, medical director of Cancer Research UK, said: "Determining the cancers affecting people in middle age provides a snapshot of our future challenges.

"It is very encouraging that death rates are falling for so many cancers.

"We are reaping the benefits of numerous improvements in early detection and treatment gained over many years.

"Half of cancers could be prevented by changes in lifestyle such as stopping smoking, maintaining a healthy body weight and a healthy diet, by being SunSmart and by attending screening."

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- Prev by Date: [*Alcohol causing mouth cancer rise*](#)
 - Next by Date: [*Teenagers are the "forgotten tribe" of cancer victims and more research is needed*](#)
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- Index(es):

- ◆ *Date*

- ◆ *Thread*