

# Heart disease beats breast cancer as the biggest killer

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Breast cancer accounts for almost a third of all cancer cases reported in women. However advances in the treatment for breast cancer, and early detection, have improved the chances of survival from the disease. New research published in BioMed Central's open access journal *Breast Cancer Research* has found that two thirds of women with breast cancer died from other causes and that over the length of the study cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death.

Breast cancer is now the most common cancer in the UK affecting one in eight women with eight out of ten of these women being over 50. Researchers from the University of Colorado analysed data from the SEER-Medicare database and followed over 60,000 women in the United States, who were at least 66 years old, from breast cancer diagnosis for up to 12 years. Almost half of the women were still alive at the end of the study. Of those who died, living on average to a respectable 83, more than two thirds died from causes other than breast cancer. In fact [cardiovascular disease](#) killed more women with breast cancer than the cancer itself.

Women diagnosed at a younger age, women with a high tumour grade or ER negative status, were at the greatest risk of dying from their disease. But, over the course of the study, it was found that older women, who were more likely to have other health problems resulting from previous cancer, cardiovascular disease, emphysema, [chronic bronchitis](#), or diabetes, were the most likely to die from causes other than their cancer. The pattern of causes of death for these women matches that seen

amongst older women in the general population, with cardiovascular disease being top of the list.

Jennifer Patnaik, from University of Colorado Denver, said, "Cancer is a big killer and is responsible for about a quarter of all deaths. However [breast cancer](#) is not necessarily a death sentence and patients need to take care of their health to reduce their risk of dying from heart disease and other age-related diseases."

**More information:** Cardiovascular disease competes with breast cancer as the leading cause of death for older females diagnosed with breast cancer: a retrospective cohort study, Jennifer L. Patnaik, Tim Byers, Carolyn DiGuseppi, Dana Dabelea and Tom Denberg, *Breast Cancer Research* (in press) [breast-cancer-research.com/](https://breast-cancer-research.com/)

Provided by BioMed Central

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