

Report sees continued advances in war against cancer

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Millions more survive today, and experts say science is paying off.

(HealthDay)—Nearly 14 million people in the United States, or one in 23, are now cancer survivors.

In comparison, only 3 million people, or one in 69, were [cancer survivors](#) in 1971, according to the third annual cancer progress report, issued Tuesday, by the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR).

While there are increasing numbers of cancer patients because some cancers are more common with age, "there is a large increase in the number of survivors," said AACR President Dr. Charles Sawyers. "That's a return on our investment in cancer research."

Sawyers, who chaired the report writing committee, is also an investigator for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and chair of the human oncology and pathogenesis program at the Memorial Sloan-

Kettering Cancer Center, in New York City.

Other noteworthy advances, Sawyers said, is the approval of 11 new anticancer drugs in the past year alone, which he called "amazing." Also of note is the evolution of immune system modifiers for cancer, such as drugs for certain lymphomas and [multiple myeloma](#), that rev up the immune system to fight the cancer. "Science is paying off, finally," he said.

From 1990 through 2012, more than 1 million lives have been saved from cancer, according to the report.

"The progress is astonishing," said Dr. Cy Stein, a distinguished professor and chair of [medical oncology](#) and experimental therapeutics at the City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center in Duarte, Calif.

"Things have been getting better. That is the truth of this report," said Stein, who is also deputy director of clinical research at City of Hope. He was not involved in the report.

Among the successes noted in the report are that the five-year survival rates for women diagnosed with [invasive breast cancer](#) have increased from 75 percent in the mid-1970s to 90 percent or more now.

For children diagnosed with [acute lymphocytic leukemia](#), the five-year survival rates have increased from 58 percent to 90 percent or greater during the same time period.

But the progress has not been uniform for all cancers. For instance, the five-year survival rates for some cancers, including the aggressive brain cancer known as glioblastoma multiforme, as well as liver, lung and pancreatic cancers, have not improved much over more than 40 years, with [survival rates](#) of 4 percent to 16 percent.

Despite the progress, more than 1.6 million Americans are expected to be diagnosed with cancer this year and more than 580,000 deaths are expected from cancer in 2013. Experts say the number will increase dramatically in the next two decades, largely due to the aging of the population, and cancer becoming more common with age.

Most cancers are detected in those age 65 and above, and this part of the population is growing quickly.

However, up to 50 percent of cancer deaths are related to preventable causes, including smoking, being obese or overweight, being sedentary and eating a poor diet, the report noted. "The average person would be surprised by how much cancer is preventable, " Sawyers said.

While smoking's link to cancer is well known, he said that many people remain unaware of the obesity-cancer connection. Obesity increases the risk for many cancers, such as esophageal, colorectal, endometrial, kidney and pancreatic cancers, and breast cancers in women past menopause.

Continued progress is jeopardized by the slashing of research funds, the report said. Earlier this year, the U.S. National Institutes of Health's budget was cut by \$1.6 billion—or more than 5 percent.

While the report covers a lot of ground, City of Hope's Stein said the authors didn't emphasize an important fact: "That people with cancer live better."

"A lot of times, even those with advanced [cancer](#) on therapy are able to engage in everyday activities," Stein said. "A lot of that is [due to] the research that we did a long time ago that has been paying off for a long time."

More information: To learn more about cancer prevention through living healthy, visit the [American Cancer Society](#).

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