

Cancer death rates drop by 20 per cent over 20 years

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The death rate from cancer has dropped by more than a fifth since the 1990s according to the latest Cancer Research UK analysis released today (Wednesday).

In 1990, 220 in every 100,000 people died of [cancer](#). Thanks to research improving the outcome for patients, this fell overall by 22 per cent to 170 per 100,000 in 2011.

Research has proved to be the key factor in reducing the number of lives lost to cancer, with improved knowledge about preventing the disease, surgical techniques, precisely targeted radiotherapy and more effective drugs all boosting the outcome for patients.

The figures are published as Cancer Research UK launches its latest campaign to raise awareness of the importance of research in beating cancer and reducing its devastating impact.

Between 1990 and 2011 the cancer mortality rate for women fell by 20 per cent from 185 down to 147 per 100,000. For men deaths dropped by 26 per cent from 277 down to 203 per 100,000.

Death rates show that the proportion of people in the UK who are dying of the disease has fallen dramatically even though more people are being diagnosed with the disease. The rising number of diagnoses is largely due to the UK's ageing population and cancer being more common in older people.

The importance of research into the causes of cancer is demonstrated by the big falls in the number of people diagnosed with [lung cancer](#) as a result of fewer men smoking.

The link between tobacco and lung cancer was confirmed through ground breaking research in the 1950s. Death rates for the disease in men have dropped by two fifths (41 per cent) in the last 20 years. But more research is still needed into developing more effective lung cancer treatments. This will give people who are diagnosed with the disease a much better chance of being cured as survival remains among the lowest of any cancer.

One example of how research will save more lives in the future is the improvements being made to bowel cancer screening. A 16-year Cancer Research UK trial showed how a one-off bowel-scope test could reduce the number of deaths from the disease by almost half (43 per cent) and can also result in the number of new cases dropping by a third, in those who take up the screening test. Introducing this test will help to improve the bowel screening programme.

Professor Peter Johnson, Cancer Research UK's chief clinician, said: "Twenty years ago I was training to become a cancer specialist, excited by the findings we were making in the laboratory and desperate to see better ways for us to treat the disease in the clinic. We needed to give patients more options and better news about their future. I was impatient for more advances sooner and I still am. But clearly we're moving in the right direction. I've personally seen in my clinics, incredible advances in cures for cancers like leukaemia and improvements in treatment options for prostate cancer. But no clinician, no researcher and no patient will be happy until we've driven down the death rate even further through research."

Lindy Berkman, 62 from London, was diagnosed with [bowel cancer](#) in

1994 at the age of 43. Originally diagnosed with [irritable bowel syndrome](#), Lindy experienced several months of severe abdominal pain and weight loss. She was eventually rushed into hospital for surgery when cancer of her sigmoid colon (stage 3) was discovered.

Lindy said: "After I was diagnosed with cancer, my life was turned upside down. At the time I had a nine year old daughter, ran my own business organising antique fairs and took no time off work apart from when I was in hospital for surgery. I was given a temporary colostomy and then six months of chemotherapy. I had the colostomy reversed in 1995. In the 19 years since then, my life has returned to normal and that's largely thanks to the research that helped develop the treatments I received. It's meant that I've been able to see my daughter get married. Research also means that more people like me are surviving the disease and are given their lives back."

Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK chief executive, said: "The words 'you have cancer' are among the most devastating a patient can hear. And for far too long far too many people have had those words ringing in their ears as they leave the consulting room.

"Today cancer is not the death sentence people once believed it to be. As these new figures show, mortality rates from this much feared disease are dropping significantly as the fruits of research are producing more effective treatments with fewer side effects. But while we're heading in the right direction, too many lives are still being lost to the disease, highlighting how much more work there is to do. Our aim is that one day everyone will beat cancer and the more research we can fund, the sooner that day will come."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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