

Lung cancer rates climb by three quarters in women while halving in men

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Lung cancer rates in women have risen by a staggering three quarters (73 per cent) over the last forty years according to new Cancer Research UK figures released today.

But while the rate for women has continued to climb, the figures show [lung cancer](#) rates have fallen by nearly half (47 per cent) in men over the same period and by a fifth (20 per cent) for people overall.

The results come as Cancer Research UK calls for a renewed effort to tackle the disease and change the way the public and researchers think about lung cancer.

Around 87 per cent of lung cancers are caused by tobacco, with the remaining 13 per cent of cases not related to tobacco. Lung cancer can take many years to develop, so these figures largely mirror changes in previous smoking rates.

Past smoking patterns vary between the sexes. Rates in men have been falling for many decades - since at least the 1950s - while for women this didn't happen until the 1970s. In men the drop has been steady, while rates for women were stable for around three decades before the drop started. During the main period of decrease for both sexes (1970s-1990s) the drop was bigger for males than females.

The lung cancer rate in women is now 41 per 100,000, up from 23 in 1975. For men, it is now 59 per 100,000, down from 112 in 1975.

The latest figures show there was a total of around 43,500 cases of lung cancer in the UK in 2011 – around 23,800 men and 19,700 women.

There were also around 35,200 deaths from lung cancer, around 19,600 men and 15,600 women.

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in the UK, but the biggest cancer killer. The fall in the men's cancer rate is the result of reducing the number of smokers, but advances in treatment have been limited and public awareness of the disease has been low despite the high death toll.

Sadly, still relatively few people survive lung cancer. Over two-thirds of patients are diagnosed at a stage when it's too late for them to be offered

treatment that could cure them.

Fewer than 10 per cent of people diagnosed with lung cancer survive for at least five years after diagnosis.

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of early diagnosis, said: "We need to improve awareness of the possible signs and symptoms of lung cancer and urge people – especially those at increased risk – to go to their doctor without delay if they spot any symptoms. We know that if people go to their GP as soon as they're aware of symptoms it can make all the difference and save lives. Look out for feeling more breathless than usual or for much of the time, a cough that has lasted longer than three weeks, an existing cough that has changed or got worse or coughing up blood. If you notice any of these or have worries about unusual changes, make an appointment to see your doctor."

Cancer Research UK believes there are several hurdles to overcome in improving the outlook for patients. Key to this is addressing the attitude that lung cancer is an unsolvable problem for research and society. This may often be excused with a suggestion that the disease is 'self-inflicted' due to the tobacco link - rather than acknowledging that many of those diagnosed with the disease are the subjects of a powerful addiction that has been promoted by the tobacco industry for over a century.

Other key priorities include raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of the disease, encouraging more people to go to their doctor earlier when symptoms are spotted, and creating a research environment that speeds up the understanding of the disease and leads to better, kinder treatments.

Efforts to continue reducing smoking rates remain vital. Plain, standardised packaging for all tobacco products must be introduced as soon as possible if the UK is to give millions of children one less reason

to start smoking. Providing support – such as the NHS Quit Smoking Services – for smokers to successfully quit must also continue.

Dr Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, said: "These figures provide a stark reminder that lung cancer remains one of the biggest challenges in cancer research. The disease kills more than twice as many people as the second most common cancer killer – bowel cancer – and this looks set to continue unless we all do more. The attitude that a lung cancer diagnosis is a death sentence must change.

"Cancer Research UK wants to make the UK a leader in lung cancer research. We're determined to build a community of the world's best researchers to help improve treatments and beat lung cancer sooner."

More information: The statistical results are available online:
[www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer ... ypes/lung/incidence/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-types/lung/incidence/)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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