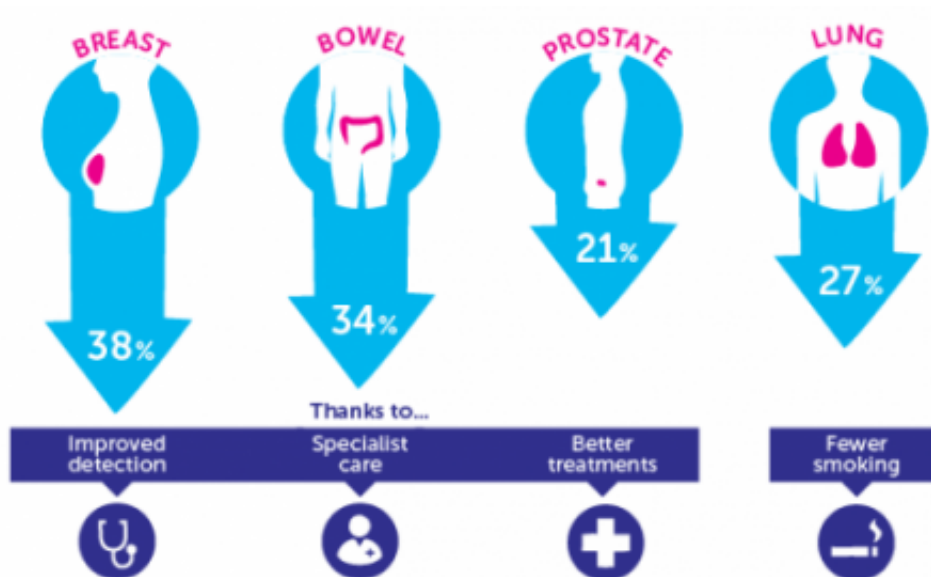


# Death rates in top four cancer killers fall by a third over 20 years

August 18 2014



Death rates for breast, bowel, lung and prostate cancer combined have fallen by almost a third (30 per cent) in the last 20 years according to the latest Cancer Research UK figures released today.

The figures\* during this period highlight how research has had a powerful impact in beating cancer.

Death rates for breast cancer have fallen by 38 per cent, [bowel cancer](#) by

34 per cent, lung cancer by 27 per cent and [prostate cancer](#) by 21 per cent.

Breast cancer scientists have been responsible for improving detection of the disease through screening, developing more specialist care and more effective treatments - such as improved surgery, radiotherapy and drugs like tamoxifen and, more recently, anastrozole and letrozole. Around 15,000 died of the disease 20 years ago compared with 11,600 now.

Research has also meant fewer bowel cancer patients are losing their lives to the disease thanks to improved early detection and the development of better treatments. Today almost 3,000 fewer people a year die from bowel cancer than 20 years ago. The recent introduction of bowel cancer screening is likely to further reduce [mortality rates](#) by ensuring more patients are diagnosed earlier.

The lung cancer story is double-edged. Research first revealed the deadly link between smoking and lung cancer 60 years ago. This led to falling smoking rates and an overall decline in mortality rates from the disease. There are now more than 3,000 fewer lung cancer deaths than 20 years ago. But as smoking rates began to fall later in women than in men, [death rates](#) have actually risen in women.

The figures during this period highlight how research has had a powerful impact in beating cancer.

Death rates for breast cancer have fallen by 38 per cent, bowel cancer by 34 per cent, lung cancer by 27 per cent and prostate cancer by 21 per cent.

Breast cancer scientists have been responsible for improving detection of the disease through screening, developing more specialist care and more effective treatments - such as improved surgery, radiotherapy and drugs

like tamoxifen and, more recently, anastrozole and letrozole. Around 15,000 died of the disease 20 years ago compared with 11,600 now.

Research has also meant fewer bowel cancer patients are losing their lives to the disease thanks to improved early detection and the development of better treatments. Today almost 3,000 fewer people a year die from bowel cancer than 20 years ago. The recent introduction of bowel cancer screening is likely to further reduce mortality rates by ensuring more patients are diagnosed earlier.

The lung cancer story is double-edged. Research first revealed the deadly link between smoking and lung cancer 60 years ago. This led to falling smoking rates and an overall decline in mortality rates from the disease. There are now more than 3,000 fewer lung cancer deaths than 20 years ago. But as smoking rates began to fall later in women than in men, death rates have actually risen in women.

There has also been little improvement in the outlook for those that are diagnosed with the disease so Cancer Research UK has made it a priority to stem [lung cancer](#) mortality through earlier diagnosis and trials for improved treatments.

Improvements in treatment - including surgery, hormone therapy, and radiotherapy - as well as earlier diagnosis, are thought to have contributed to the trend of reduced prostate cancer death rates.

The drop in death rates is not the only good news. Cancer survival in the UK has doubled in the last 40 years. Today, half those diagnosed with cancer survive the disease for at least 10 years. Cancer Research UK's ambition is to accelerate progress so that three quarters will survive cancer within the next 20 years.

But not all cancer death rates have dropped. Mortality rates in liver,

pancreatic, melanoma, oral and some digestive cancers have all increased.

New mum Nicola Bourne from Harpenden was diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer in 2012 aged just 31. She had intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy to shrink the tumour, a 12 hour operation to remove it and then a further course of chemo finally finishing on Christmas Eve 2012. She's been cancer-free ever since.

Nicola's experience had a shocking ring of familiarity. Her mother had died from bowel cancer three years earlier after enduring six years of gruelling treatment. So Nicola knew what to expect – or so she thought.

"I expected the worst but almost everything about the treatment had changed," she said. "You could just see how much it had improved from when I went through it with mum. While my mother had chemo in the hospital I could take a pill at home. The difference in how cancer care and treatment had moved on in 10 years was phenomenal – thanks to research I'm incredibly optimistic that in another 10 years things will have got even better.

"Soon after my mother was diagnosed, my grandmother realised she'd been having similar symptoms and she too was diagnosed with bowel cancer. But unfortunately it was too late for treatment and she died aged 69. When I was referred for genetic counselling I discovered my great grandfather had died from the same thing making four generations affected by the same cancer."

	Mortality rate		% change	Number of deaths	
	1991-1993	2010-2012		1991-1993	2010-2012
UK					
Top 4 combined	145.5	102.4	-29.6	81,810	73,412
Lung (person)	52.2	38.1	-26.9	38,423	35,144
Breast (female)	38.9	24.3	-37.5	15,055	11,629
Bowel (person)	24.5	16.3	-33.7	18,827	15,855
Prostate (male)	29.8	23.6	-20.8	9,505	10,784

To remove the effects of random variations in rates from year to year the percentage change in rates is based on European age-standardised mortality rates for 1991-1993 and 2010-2012. Mortality rates and the annual average number of deaths in those periods are shown here.

Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, said: "Research continues to help save lives from cancer, and these figures offer renewed encouragement that progress continues. The UK remains a world leader in cancer research, responsible for many of the breakthroughs that have reduced the impact of cancer. But while the death rate for the four biggest cancer killers falls, it's vital to remember that more needs to be done to help bring even better results over the coming years.

"There are over 200 different forms of the disease. For some of these, the advances are less impressive, such as pancreatic, oesophageal and liver cancer. Far too many lives continue to be affected by the disease. We're determined that the research we fund will help save more lives, developing better, kinder treatments which will beat [cancer](#) sooner."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

Citation: Death rates in top four cancer killers fall by a third over 20 years (2014, August 18) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-death-cancer-killers-fall-years.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.