

Cancer, heart disease, stroke deaths down, life span stays put

January 1 2015, by Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

Heart disease and cancer, which cause of deaths of half of Americans who die each year, continued to loosen their deadly grip in 2013, while rates of deaths attributed to flu and pneumonia surged, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention said this week.

Posting its year-end "data brief" on mortality in the United States in 2013, the CDC reported no change in expected life spans for Americans: On average, an American woman can expect to live to 81.2 years of age - 85.5 if she makes it to the age of 65. A man can expect, on average, to live to 76.4 years of age. A man still alive at age 65 is likely to live, on average, to almost 83.

Of the 2.6 million deaths reported in the United States in 2013, 611,105 - almost 24 percent - were because of [heart disease](#). Some 584,881 - nearly 23 percent - were attributed to cancer.

Stroke, the nation's fourth-leading cause of death in 2012, dropped to No. 5 as a killer of Americans in 2013, despite the fact that Americans are suffering strokes at increasingly younger ages. In 2013, 128,978 Americans died of [stroke](#), and the likelihood of an American dying of stroke at any age fell by 1.9 percent from its 2012 level-roughly the same drop as was seen with [cancer](#).

Unintentional injuries-including motor vehicle crashes, falls and other accidents-became the nation's fourth-leading cause of death in 2013, claiming nearly as many lives (130,557) as chronic lower respiratory

diseases such as emphysema and asthma (149,205). Alzheimer's disease deaths (84,767) ticked downward almost imperceptibly; the neurodegenerative condition remains the No. 6 cause of death in America.

Influenza and [pneumonia](#)-the eighth most-common cause of death-collectively claimed just under 57,000 American lives in 2013, up from 50,636 in 2012.

Deaths from diabetes and [kidney disease](#) remained steady, as the seventh and ninth most-common causes of death, respectively, in 2013. And [death](#) by suicide, the 10th-ranked killer of Americans, stayed steady between 2012 and 2013. Some 41,149 Americans died by their own hand in 2013.

The American Heart Association hailed the decline in stroke deaths as progress, attributing it in part to improvements in treatments to restore blood flow to the brain and to prevention, such as treatment with blood-pressure lowering medications.

The speed and precision with which strokes are diagnosed and treated are improving, with the proliferation of specialized stroke centers and better protocols at emergency departments across the nation, said Dr. Ralph Sacco, past president of the American Heart Association and chairman of neurology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

"However, although mortality from stroke is dropping, we know that the number of people having strokes in the U.S. is rising each year due to the aging of our population and other signs that strokes have increased in younger groups," said Sacco, who in 2010 became the first neurologist to be named American Heart Association president.

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