

# One in two people in UK will get cancer, study says

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One in two people will develop cancer at some point in their lives, according to the most accurate forecast to date from Cancer Research UK, and published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today.

The new figure highlights the urgent need to bolster [public health](#) and

NHS [cancer](#) services so they can cope with a growing and ageing population and the looming demands for better diagnostics, treatments, and earlier diagnosis. Prevention must also play an important role in the concerted effort required to reduce the impact of the disease in coming decades.

Thanks to research, the UK's cancer survival has doubled over the last 40 years and around half of patients now survive the disease for more than 10 years. But, as more people benefit from improved healthcare and longer life expectancy, the number of cancer cases is expected to rise. This new research estimating lifetime risk finds that, from now on\*, 1 in 2 people will be diagnosed with the disease.

This new estimate replaces the previous figure, calculated using a different method, which predicted that more than 1 in 3 people would develop cancer at some point in their lives.

Age is the biggest risk factor for most cancers, and the increase in [lifetime risk](#) is primarily because more people are surviving into old age, when cancer is more common.

Study author Professor Peter Sasieni, based at Queen Mary University of London, said: "Cancer is primarily a disease of old age, with more than 60 per cent of all cases diagnosed in people aged over 65. If people live long enough then most will get cancer at some point. But there's a lot we can do to make it less likely - like giving up smoking, being more active, drinking less alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight.

"If we want to reduce the risk of developing the disease we must redouble our efforts and take action now to better prevent the disease for future generations."

Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, said: "We're

living longer and that means we're more likely to develop a range of age-related health issues. We need to plan ahead to make sure the NHS is fit to cope. If the NHS doesn't act and invest now, we will face a crisis in the future - with outcomes from cancer going backwards.

"As Simon Stevens set out in the NHS Five Year Forward View, we need better planning and innovative design of services. We also need to ensure the health service is adequately funded if we're to deal effectively with the growing burden of cancer and offer all patients the best chance of long term survival.

"But NHS investment isn't the only answer. We need a concerted approach and a broader sense of how we can save lives and money by preventing more cancers. Growing older is the biggest risk factor for most cancers - and it's something we can't avoid. But more than four in ten cancers diagnosed each year in the UK could be prevented by changes in lifestyle - that's something we can all aim for personally so that we can stack the odds in our favour."

Kumar added: "Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen [cancer survival](#) in the UK double in the last 40 years. In order to accelerate progress and see more people beating the disease, we have to make sure our NHS cancer services and public health initiatives match our research by being among the best in the world."

**More information:** A S Ahmad, N Ormiston-Smith and PS Sasieni. 'Trends in the lifetime risk of developing cancer in Great Britain: Comparison of risk for those born in 1930 to 1960'. *British Journal of Cancer*, 2015. [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2014.606](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2014.606)

\*Some previous estimates have suggested that, in the UK, we will reach a lifetime cancer risk of 1 in 2 at some point in the future. But this

research shows that we have already reached this point for those born in the early 1960s and beyond. From this we can now forecast that a child born today has a 1 in 2 chance of developing cancer at some point in their lives.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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