

Men with anxiety are more likely to die of cancer, study says

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Men over 40 who are plagued with the omnipresent of generalized anxiety disorder are more than twice as likely to die of cancer than are men who do not have the mental affliction, new research finds. But for women who suffer from severe anxiety, the research found no increased risk of cancer death.

That finding, presented Tuesday at the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology's Congress in Vienna, emerges from the largest study ever to explore a link between anxiety and cancer. It tracked 15,938 Britons over 40 for 15 years.

Even after researchers took account of factors that boost the risk of cancer, including age, alcohol consumption, smoking and chronic diseases, men with a diagnosis of [generalized anxiety disorder](#) were 2.15 times as likely to die of cancer than were those with no such diagnosis.

Generalized anxiety disorder - a condition marked by excessive, uncontrollable worry about many areas of life - affected women more commonly than it did men. Among women in the large cohort studied, 2.4 percent suffered from the disorder. Among men in the cohort, 1.8 percent did.

The authors of the new research acknowledge that the findings do not reveal how cancer and anxiety are related, and do not show that anxiety causes cancer. Men with anxiety may engage in behaviors that increase cancer risk. But the two diseases may also spring from common origins, including, possibly, higher rates of systemic inflammation.

Whatever the relationship, says the study's lead author, the new findings identify extremely anxious men as a population whose mental and physical health should be closely tracked.

"Society may need to consider anxiety as a warning signal for poor health," said study lead author Olivia Remes of Cambridge University's Institute of Public Health. "With this study, we show that anxiety is more than just a personality trait," but rather, a disorder linked to real and serious health risks.

Imperial College psychiatrist David Nutt, who was not involved in the

new research, said the intense distress suffered by those with anxiety comes with insomnia and widespread physical stress.

"That is bound to have a major impact on many physiological processes, including immune supervision of cancerous cells," said Nutt, a former president of the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology.

"As a psychiatrist who used to run one of the very few clinics in the U.K. specialized in the treatment of people with [severe anxiety](#) disorders, these results do not surprise me," Nutt added.

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