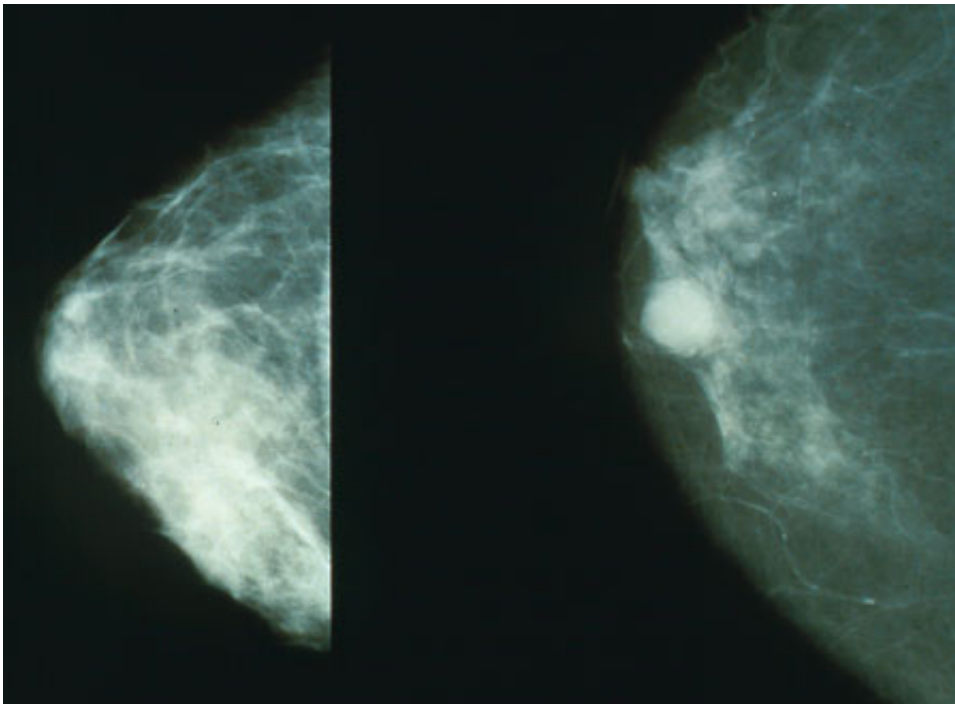


More than half a million breast cancer deaths averted in the US over three decades

February 11 2019



Mammograms showing a normal breast (left) and a breast with cancer (right).
Credit: Public Domain

Latest U.S. estimates indicate that since 1989, hundreds of thousands of women's lives have been saved by mammography and improvements in breast cancer treatment. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings point to progress made in early detection and management of breast cancer.

Screening [mammography](#) for the detection of breast cancer became widely available in the mid-1980s, and various effective therapies have been developed since that time. To estimate the number of breast cancer deaths averted since 1989 due to the collective effects of both [screening](#) mammography and improved treatment, R. Edward Hendrick, Ph.D., of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Jay Baker, MD, of Duke University Medical Center, and Mark Helvie, MD, of the University of Michigan Health System, analyzed breast cancer mortality data and female population data for U.S. [women](#) aged 40 to 84 years over the past three decades.

Cumulative breast cancer deaths averted from 1990 to 2015 ranged from more than 305,000 women to more than 483,000 women depending on different background mortality assumptions. When extrapolating results to 2018, cumulative breast cancer deaths averted since 1989 ranged from 384,000 to 614,500. When considering 2018 alone, an estimated 27,083 to 45,726 breast cancer deaths were averted. The investigators calculated that mammography and improved treatment decreased the expected mortality rate of breast cancer in 2018 by 45.3 to 58.3 percent.

"Recent reviews of mammography screening have focused media attention on some of the risks of mammography screening, such as call-backs for additional imaging and breast biopsies, downplaying the most important aspect of screening—that finding and treating breast cancer early saves women's lives. Our study provides evidence of just how effective the combination of [early detection](#) and modern [breast cancer treatment](#) have been in averting breast cancer deaths," said Dr. Hendrick.

He noted that currently, only about half of U.S. women over 40 years of age receive regular screening mammography. "The best possible long-term effect of our findings would be to help women recognize that early detection and modern, personalized breast cancer treatment saves lives and to encourage more women to get screened annually starting at age

40."

Dr. Helvie added that additional benefits will likely be realized as research continues. "While we anticipate new scientific advances that will further reduce [breast cancer](#) deaths and morbidity, it is important that women continue to comply with existing screening and treatment recommendations," he said.

More information: "Breast Cancer Deaths Averted Over Three Decades." R. Edward Hendrick, Jay A. Baker, and Mark A. Helvie. *Cancer* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.31954](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.31954)

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