

More than two million years of life lost to cancer in the UK each year

October 11 2023



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Over two million years of life are lost to cancer in the UK every year, according to new research published today in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

The study, by researchers from King's College London, working with Cancer Research UK, shows that a fifth of the total lost years are from [lung cancer](#) (more than 500,000 per year), due to the high number of people diagnosed and poor survival. More than 213,000 years of life are lost to [bowel cancer](#) each year and around 197,000 to [breast cancer](#).

Although the number of years of life lost to cancer has risen since the 1980s due to the UK's growing population, the rates of lives lost has gone down by 15% over the 30-year study period due to early detection and research into successful treatments. The biggest decreases in these rates have been in stomach (down by 59%), cervical (down by 58%) and breast cancers (down by 39%).

Researchers used the age at which [cancer patients](#) died from their disease, and [average life expectancy](#) for the [general population](#), to estimate how many years were lost to cancer. This is the first statistical analysis of this kind from Cancer Research UK showing how much time is being lost to the disease.

"This analysis allows us to see the impact cancer has on patients and their families, and the precious time that is lost as a result. Measuring years of life lost over a 30-year period provides a different lens to evaluate where health policies and advances in treatment have worked and highlight areas where more needs to be done. Research like this is instrumental in helping leaders in health and politics make the best decisions for patients and their loved ones," says Dr. Judith Offman, who led the work at the School of Cancer & Pharmaceutical Sciences and is now senior lecturer in [cancer prevention](#) and early detection at Queen Mary University of London.

The analysis shows that cancer types like liver, melanoma and kidney have seen increases in rates of years of life lost, largely because of an increase in the number of people being diagnosed. But other cancers are

seeing progress.

The total number of years of life lost to [cervical cancer](#) in 1988 was around 43,600. But thanks to the effectiveness of a cervical screening program in reducing the number of cases and diagnosing people earlier, this number has plummeted to around 21,800. Although incidence has decreased, cervical cancer disproportionately affects younger people, and still claims one of the highest years of life lost per patient (25 years on average).

Similarly, some cancers, like testicular, contribute a smaller number of lost years overall because they are less common—but their impact on individuals is substantial. For example, on average, people with [testicular cancer](#) lose 33 years of life, because it is usually diagnosed in younger people. So though relatively few people die from the disease because survival is high, those who do die, are usually younger.

Some other cancer types are more common, but contribute comparatively fewer years of life lost, because they are usually diagnosed in older age or have relatively high survival. For example, prostate cancer makes up 26% of cases among men, but only accounts for 9% of annual years of life lost to cancer.

Cancer Research UK's chief executive, Michelle Mitchell, said, "This new analysis is a stark reminder of the impact cancer has on so many people's lives in the UK today. Behind statistics are people affected by cancer, and these years of life lost are missed chances to reach milestones and spend precious time with loved ones.

"Organizations like Cancer Research UK have helped in the progress we've seen in areas like cervical cancer, and these successes showcase the power of investment in research. But we can't take our foot off the accelerator now. Cancer must be at the top of the agenda for the UK

Government and that's why we're developing a Manifesto for Cancer Research and Care; a blueprint of actionable policies to help prevent, detect and treat more cancers and ultimately, save lives."

Provided by King's College London

Citation: More than two million years of life lost to cancer in the UK each year (2023, October 11) retrieved 21 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-10-million-years-life-lost-cancer.html>

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