

Coping with a cancer diagnosis can contribute to psychological and cardiovascular problems in family members

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New research suggests that a family member's cancer diagnosis may increase first-degree relatives' and spouses' risks of developing

psychological and cardiovascular illnesses. The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Cancer*.

Having a family member diagnosed with cancer can be a stressful and [traumatic experience](#) for the entire family. Because [stress](#) influences not only [mental health](#) but also [cardiovascular health](#), investigators explored whether a [cancer diagnosis](#) contributes to negative psychological and cardiovascular outcomes in family members.

Using data from the Utah Population Database, the researchers identified 77,938 first-degree relatives and spouses of 49,284 individuals diagnosed with genitourinary cancer between 1990 and 2015, and they compared them with 81,022 relatives and spouses of 246,775 individuals not diagnosed with cancer.

The team found that 7.1% of relatives and spouses were diagnosed with a psychological illness within 5 years of a family member's cancer diagnosis, and 7.6% were diagnosed with a cardiovascular illness. Compared with controls, they had 10%, 5%, and 4% higher risks of developing a psychological condition at 1, 3, and 5 years after a family member's cancer diagnosis. They also had 28%, 16%, and 14% higher risks of developing cardiovascular disease at 1, 3, and 5 years.

Parents of children with cancer experienced the highest risks of developing negative health outcomes—a nearly 4-times increased risk at 1-year compared with other relatives. Also, a diagnosis of kidney or [bladder cancer](#) appeared to be the most stressful among genitourinary cancer types, while testis cancer was the least.

"A diagnosis of cancer is a life-changing event for patients and their families. With our group's unique access to the Utah Population Database, we were able to create multi-generational networks highlighting the impact of a cancer diagnosis on families," said lead

author Mounieb Choudry, MD, of the Mayo Clinic, in Phoenix, Arizona. "As health care professionals, we should take a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the stress of a cancer diagnosis by helping mitigate financial toxicity, treatment burden, and emotional impact on both the patient and their family."

More information: Mounieb M. Choudry et al, Genitourinary Cancer and Family: The Reverberating Psychological and Cardiovascular Effects of a Genitourinary Cancer Diagnosis on First-Degree Relatives and Spouses, *Cancer* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.35486](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.35486)

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