

# Tipping point? Half of patients are now cured of cancer

By Laura Donnelly

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Women with breast cancer now have a 78 per cent chance of surviving at least a decade.

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Half of patients who are diagnosed with cancer in Britain today will be "cured", according to the authors of landmark new research.

Experts hailed the findings as a "tipping point", and said that dramatic improvements in diagnosis and treatment meant cancer could soon be classed as a chronic condition instead of a "death sentence".

The study of 7 million British cancer patients concluded that 50 per cent of those diagnosed can expect to survive for at least 10 years - by which point their prognosis is as good as for those without the disease.

Forty years ago, less than one quarter of patients survived a decade, the data from Cancer Research UK shows.

Charities said the trends showed a rapid acceleration in survival, and that they were "confident" of making more major strides, announcing ambitions to achieve 75 per cent survival within 20 years.

Dr Harpal Kumar, the charity's chief executive, said: "It's not very long ago that cancer used to be thought of as a death sentence.

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"The reason this 50 per cent figure is an important tipping point is it's saying that, actually, now half of all patients will survive at least 10 years after a diagnosis - and for many it will be very much longer than that. I think that does represent a change in the way we should be thinking

about cancer."

After a decade, survivors were no more likely to die of the disease than anyone else. Professor Michel Coleman of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "As a whole, patients who have survived that long no longer have any different chances of surviving than the rest of the population - in that sense, it would represent a 'cure?'".

The study, based on data from more than 7 million adults in England and Wales diagnosed between 1971 and 2011, showed long-term increases in one, five and 10-year survival.

An "all-cancers survival index" was calculated that combined figures for 17 types of cancer. The length of time half of cancer patients could expect to live had risen from just one year in 1971-72 to five years in 2005-06, and 10 years for those diagnosed in 2010-11, the study found.

The data shows dramatic improvements in survival rates for some of the most common forms of the disease, including cancers of the breast, prostate and testes.

Rates of 10-year survival for testicular cancer rose from 69 per cent to 98 per cent, and for malignant skin cancer from 46 per cent to 89 per cent.

Women with breast cancer now have a 78 per cent chance of surviving at least a decade, compared with 40 per cent in 1971, the data shows.

Meanwhile, the proportion of men living at least 10 years with prostate cancer rose from 25 per cent to 80 per cent.

Dr Kumar said: "Twenty years from now we want to see three quarters of all patients surviving at least 10 years following a diagnosis of cancer. That's a big step forward from where we are today, but we firmly believe that's achievable.

However, survival rates in Britain were still lagging behind those in many countries in Europe, researchers said, with too many cases being missed by GPs and less effective treatment after diagnosis.

- [Daily Telegraph UK](#)

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By Nick Triggle Health correspondent, BBC News



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Half of people in England and Wales now being diagnosed with cancer will survive at least a decade - double the rate in the early 1970s, figures show.

But Cancer Research UK, which carried out the research, said the progress showed there needed to be new, more ambitious aims.

It said it wanted to see 10-year survival hit 75% in the next 20 years.

And it promised to increase investment in research by half within the next decade to help achieve that.

Researchers said cancer need no longer be viewed as the "death sentence" it once was with the new figures suggesting a "tipping point" had been reached.

'Significant progress'

The analysis showed that in 1971-2, 50% of people diagnosed with cancer died within a year. Now 50% survive for at least a decade - up from 24% in 1971-2.

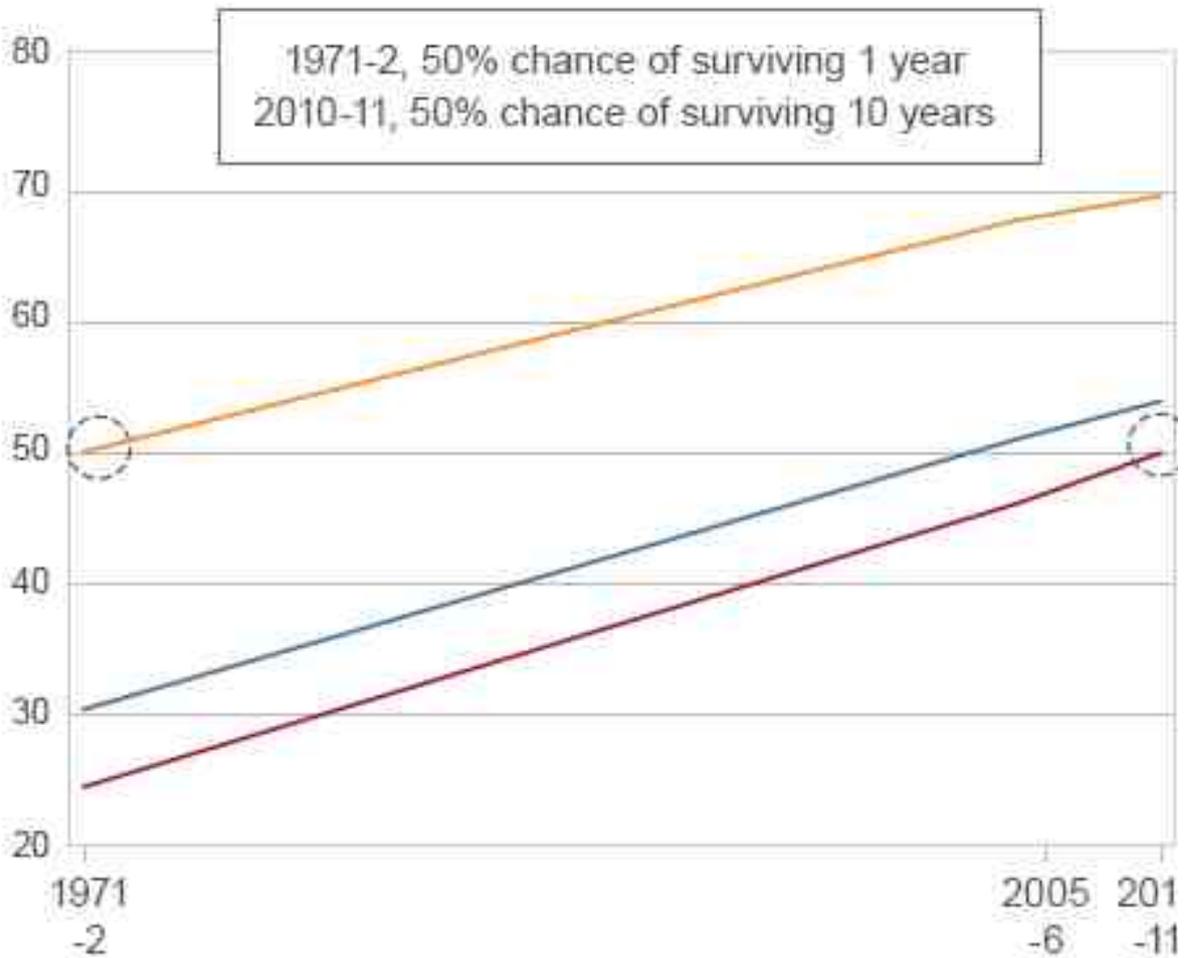
But the findings, based on the outcomes for more than 7 million patients, also showed that for some cancers, survival rates were still very low.

For example, just 1% of pancreatic cancer patients and 5% of lung cancer patients can expect to survive for 10 years.

## Cancer survival rates

%

1 year 5 years 10 years



Source: Cancer Research UK

Nonetheless, the overall figures showed there had been significant progress in the way cancer was treated.

The findings have been adjusted to take into account the changing profile of new cancer being diagnosed - there has been a shift away from the more deadly disease such as lung cancer to ones where survival rates tend to be better - so provide a measure of how the care of cancer patients has improved.

Cancer Research UK chief executive Dr Harpal Kumar said: "I don't think we would ever have expected to achieve what we have. We're gradually reversing the tide on this devastating disease.

"But many people still do not survive - we must tackle that."

Researchers said there were a number of reasons for the success.

New treatments had played a role as well as earlier diagnosis and screening.

But if progress is going to continue - and the 75% target achieved - Cancer Research UK identified key areas to focus on. These included investment in personalised cancer treatment, reducing smoking rates and paying particular attention to the cancers with the lowest survival rates.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Health, which has itself set targets to improve cancer survival rates in the coming years, said: "We share Cancer Research UK's aspirations for the UK to be the best place in the world to survive cancer.

"We have seen significant improvements in some cancer survival rates, with new and innovative research and earlier diagnosis at the heart of this upward trend."