

## National

## Health

## Ovarian cancer deaths down 20% in a decade

Death rates from ovarian cancer, one of the hardest cancers to detect and treat, have dropped by 20% in a decade, according to official figures.

The figures from the National Cancer Intelligence Network will be widely welcomed because ovarian cancer has so often in the past been seen as a death sentence. The figures show a drop in deaths in England from 3,820 in 2001 (11.2 for every 100,000 women) to 3,453 (8.8 per 100,000) in 2010.

Since the mid-80s the proportion of women surviving for one year has gone up from 57% to 73%, while five-year survival has risen from 33% to 44%.

But the biggest drop in deaths has been among those aged 40-69. Over 80% of deaths are in women aged 60 and over. The majority (84%) of women aged 15 to 39 who were diagnosed survived for at least five years, compared with only 14% of those older than 85.

"We know systematic under-treatment of older cancer patients has left many with significantly reduced odds of survival," said Dr Siobhan McClelland, head of research and evidence at Macmillan Cancer Support. "This needs to change."

Dr Andy Nordin, gynaecological oncologist at East Kent Hospitals University NHS foundation trust and study author, said the drop in deaths "may reflect improvements in detecting and treating the disease, such as improvements in scanning, surgery and chemotherapy treatments".

**Sarah Boseley**

## Ovarian cancer death rates fall as doctors improve diagnosis

**Martin Barrow**

Ovarian cancer is often referred to as a "silent killer" as women are generally unaware they have it until it has spread to an advanced stage.

But figures out today suggest that doctors are getting better at diagnosing the condition. Death rates from ovarian cancer have fallen by 20 per cent in the past decade, particularly in those aged 40 to 69, according to the National Cancer Intelligence Network.

Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer in women in the UK, with about 7,000 cases diagnosed each year.

However, the report also showed that survival rates have increased since the mid-1980s. The proportion of women surviving the disease for at least a year has risen from 57 per cent to 73 per cent, and for five years from 33 per cent to 44 per cent.

The report found the chance of

surviving the disease becomes worse with age, even allowing for higher mortality among older people generally. In 2009 almost half of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer were in their 60s or 70s and more than 80 per cent of deaths were in women aged 60 or over.

Dr Andy Nordin, gynaecological oncologist at East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust and author of the study, said the fall in deaths may reflect improvements in detecting and treating the disease.

He added: "We know the risk of developing some types of ovarian cancer may be related to the number of times a woman ovulates in her lifetime. And anytime that she stops ovulating such as during pregnancy, early menopause and taking the contraceptive Pill all help to protect against the disease developing. The fall in incidence could partially reflect the use of hormonal contraceptives since the 1960s."

## Ovarian cancer deaths fall by 26% in 20 years

By Sophie Borland  
Health Reporter

THE NUMBER of women dying from ovarian cancer has fallen by a quarter in 20 years thanks to earlier diagnosis and better treatment, say researchers.

And the length of time the women survived for also increased, especially amongst women aged between 40 and 60. Ovarian cancer is known as the "silent killer" because it is notoriously difficult to diagnose and is often detected only once it has spread to other organs. It remains the fifth most common

## 'Improvements in treating the disease'

form of cancer amongst women, with 6,500 cases diagnosed in Britain a year. Scientists from the National Cancer Intelligence Network compared data on mortality and survival from 1989 with the latest figures from 2009.

"They found that mortality rates had fallen from 11.9 per cent per 100,000 women in 1989 to 8.8 per cent in 2009 - a drop of 26 per cent."

And almost three quarters of sufferers survived for at least a year, with 44 per cent still alive five years later.

In 1989, a little over half of patients lived beyond a year and only a third survived for five years. The biggest improvements in survival rates occurred amongst 40 to

60-year-olds. Rates for those aged 45 to 49 rose almost 50 per cent in ten years, with 61 per cent living for at least a year.

Experts believe these women have responded particularly well to national awareness campaigns alerting them to the early warning signs of the disease.

This has coincided with improve-

ments in care, with patients usually referred to specialised gynaecology centres run by highly experienced surgeons and consultants.

But the NCIN - which is funded by the Government and cancer charities to carry out research - found that survival rates have barely improved amongst the

## 'DON'T IGNORE SYMPTOMS'

SUE Betts was diagnosed with ovarian cancer three years ago. She had been feeling bloated and full after meals for months but put it down to changes in her body as a result of the menstrual cycle.

But she couldn't understand why she seemed to be gaining weight around her stomach, despite going to the gym on a regular basis. Eventually, realising her symptoms weren't normal, she went to her GP.

He suspected she had ovarian cancer and sent her for tests under the NHS two-week emergency referral policy.

The 49-year-old retail worker underwent a full hys-

terectomy to remove the tumour and, thankfully, the illness has not returned.

Mrs Betts, who lives with her husband Phil, also 49, in Knebworth, Hertfordshire, said: "Looking back, my symptoms had been there for months, gradually getting worse."

"But my body had just got used to it. So many women don't even know about this illness."

"There are clear symptoms to look out for - bloating, needing to go to the toilet, always feeling full, some people get tummy pain."

"If they don't go away, then get it checked out."

"Know what's normal for your body."

elderly. Only 24 per cent of over-85s lived for at least a year, compared with 23 per cent living this long in 1989.

Elderly women may also be less aware of the symptoms and unwilling to trouble their GP even if they suspect something is wrong.

Lead author Andy Nordin, a consultant gynaecologist at East Kent

Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, said: "This drop in deaths may reflect improvements in detecting and treating the disease, such as improvements in scanning, surgery and chemotherapy treatments."

Additionally, over the past decade, ovarian cancer patients throughout the UK have experienced better management due to organisation of ovarian cancer care in specialist gynaecological cancer centres, planning of care by teams of cancer experts and specialist surgery by specially trained and accredited gynaecological oncologists.

A number of charities have run awareness campaigns over the past decade alerting women to the warning signs of the disease, which include bloating, loss of appetite and severe pain.

Patients and GPs can often confuse these symptoms with irritable bowel syndrome or period pains. The NHS is hoping to improve diagnosis rates and last year a £20 blood test capable of detecting the illness was made available to GPs for the first time.

Chris Carrigan, head of the NCIN, said: "As ovarian cancer can be very hard to diagnose and treat, this report was important to help us learn as much as we can about the numbers of women who develop the disease, how many survive and how many die."

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Get symptoms checked: Sue Betts



## More women now surviving ovarian cancer

Deaths from ovarian cancer have fallen by a fifth in a decade in England, figures reveal.

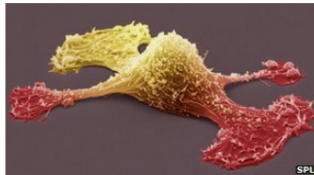
They show the disease now kills about nine in every 100,000 women, compared with 11 in every 100,000 in 2001.

Faster diagnosis and better treatment mean women are now surviving with their cancer for longer - five-year survival has increased from 33% to 44% over that period.

But experts say more still needs to be done to tackle ovarian cancer.

About 7,000 women develop it each year, making it the fifth most common cancer in women in the UK.

And ovarian cancer remains difficult for doctors to diagnose, which means it is often not picked up until it is more advanced and harder to treat.



Early treatment may stop the cancer from spreading

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## Ovarian cancer deaths fall by 26% in 20 years thanks to early diagnosis and better treatment

- Length of time woman survived also increased, especially among 40-60s
- Ovarian cancer hard to diagnose and often detected after it has spread
- It is the 5th most common form of cancer amongst women with 6,500 cases diagnosed in Britain a year

By SOPHIE BORLAND

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And the length of time the women survived for also increased, especially amongst women aged between 40 and 60.

Ovarian cancer is known as the 'silent killer' because it is notoriously difficult to diagnose and is often detected only once it has spread to other organs. It remains the fifth most common form of cancer amongst women, with 6,500 cases diagnosed in Britain a year.

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## Ovarian cancer death rates drop 20% in a decade

Official figures show 8.8 deaths per 100,000 women in 2010, down from 11.2 in 2001

Sarah Boseley, health editor

The Guardian, Tuesday 20 November 2012



Ovarian cancer survival rates were worst for older patients, with more than 80% of deaths in women aged 60 or over. Photograph: Martin Godwin

Death rates from ovarian cancer, one of the hardest cancers to detect and treat, have dropped by 20% in a decade, according to official figures.

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### Ovarian cancer death rates 'down 20 per cent'

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Rates of women dying from ovarian cancer in England have fallen by around 20 per cent in the past decade, new figures show.

A report from the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) reveals that death rates from the disease fell from 11.2 per 100,000 women in 2001 to 8.8 per 100,000 in 2010.

The most significant drop in deaths involved women between the ages of 40 and 69 years.

Meanwhile, the proportion of women who survive ovarian cancer for at least a year has risen from 57 to 73 per cent since the middle of the 1980s, while five-year survival has increased from 33 to 44 per cent.

However, the risk of dying from the disease remains significantly higher for women over the age of 85 than for those under the age of 40.

Study author Dr Andy Nordin, a gynaecological oncologist at East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, said: 'Our new report is very encouraging and shows a fall in the rates of women dying from ovarian cancer - a type of cancer that has always been notoriously hard to treat.'

He suggested that improvements have been due to advances in scanning, surgery and chemotherapy treatments for the disease, as well as the introduction of specialist gynaecological cancer centres.