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# Cancer Facts & Figures 2003



Rates are age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

Estimated number of new cancer cases for 2003, excluding basal and squamous cell skin cancers and in situ carcinomas except urinary bladder.

Note: These estimates are offered as a rough guide and should be interpreted with caution. They are calculated according to the distribution of estimated cancer deaths in 2003 by state. State estimates may not add to US total due to rounding.

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Special Section:  
Smoking Cessation  
see page 21

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*\*Indicates a figure or table*



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# Cancer: Basic Facts

## What Is Cancer?

Cancer is a group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. If the spread is not controlled, it can result in death. Cancer is caused by both external factors (tobacco, chemicals, radiation, and infectious organisms) and internal factors (inherited mutations, hormones, immune conditions, and mutations that occur from metabolism). Causal factors may act together or in sequence to initiate or promote carcinogenesis. Ten or more years often pass between exposures or mutations and detectable cancer. Cancer is treated by surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormones, and immunotherapy.

## Can Cancer Be Prevented?

All cancers caused by cigarette smoking and heavy use of alcohol could be prevented completely. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2003 more than 180,000 cancer deaths are expected to be caused by tobacco use.

Scientific evidence suggests that about one-third of the 556,500 cancer deaths expected to occur in 2003 will be related to nutrition, physical inactivity, obesity, and other lifestyle factors and could also be prevented. Certain cancers are related to infectious exposures, e.g., hepatitis B virus (HBV), human papillomavirus (HPV), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), helicobacter, and others, and could be prevented through behavioral changes, vaccines, or antibiotics. In addition, many of the more than 1 million skin cancers that are expected to be diagnosed in 2003 could have been prevented by protection from the sun's rays.

Regular screening examinations by a health care professional can result in the detection of cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, cervix, prostate, testis, oral cavity, and skin at earlier stages, when treatment is more likely to be successful. Self-examinations for cancers of the breast and skin may also result in detection of tumors at earlier stages. Cancers that can be detected by screening account for about half of all new cancer cases. The 5-year relative survival rate for these cancers is about 82%. If all of these cancers were diagnosed at a localized stage through regular cancer screenings, 5-year survival would increase to about 95%.

## Who Is at Risk of Developing Cancer?

Anyone. Since the occurrence of cancer increases as individuals age, most cases affect adults beginning in

middle age. About 77% of all cancers are diagnosed at ages 55 and older. Cancer researchers use the word *risk* in different ways. *Lifetime risk* refers to the probability that an individual, over the course of a lifetime, will develop cancer or die from it. In the US, men have a little less than 1 in 2 lifetime risk of developing cancer; for women the risk is a little more than 1 in 3.

*Relative risk* is a measure of the strength of the relationship between risk factors and the particular cancer. It compares the risk of developing cancer in persons with a certain exposure or trait to the risk in persons who do not have this exposure or trait. For example, male smokers have a 20-fold relative risk of developing lung cancer compared with nonsmokers. This means that they are about 20 times more likely to develop lung cancer than nonsmokers. Most relative risks are not this large. For example, women who have a first-degree (mother, sister, or daughter) family history of breast cancer have about a 2-fold increased risk of developing breast cancer compared with women who do not have a family history. This means that women with a first-degree family history are about two times more likely to develop breast cancer than women who do not have a family history of the disease.

All cancers involve the malfunction of genes that control cell growth and division. About 5% to 10% of cancers are clearly hereditary, in that an inherited faulty gene predisposes the person to a very high risk of particular cancers. The remainder of cancers are not hereditary, but result from damage to genes (mutations) that occurs throughout our lifetime, either due to internal factors, such as hormones or the digestion of nutrients within cells, or external factors, such as tobacco, chemicals, and sunlight.

## How Many People Alive Today Have Ever Had Cancer?

The National Cancer Institute estimates that approximately 8.9 million Americans with a history of cancer were alive in January, 1999. Some of these individuals were cancer-free, while others still had evidence of cancer and may have been undergoing treatment.

## How Many New Cases Are Expected to Occur This Year?

About 1,334,100 new cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in 2003. Since 1990, over 17 million new cancer cases have been diagnosed. These estimates do not include carcinoma in situ (noninvasive cancer) of any site except urinary bladder, and do not include basal and squamous cell skin cancers. More than 1 million

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