What Percentage of People Survive Cancer?

The 5-year relative survival rate for all cancers combined has increased substantially since the early 1960s, from 39% to 70% among whites and from 27% to 64% among blacks. Improvements in survival (Table 7) reflect advances in treatment, as well as earlier diagnosis for some cancers. Survival varies greatly by cancer type, as well as stage and age at diagnosis (Table 8).

Relative survival is the proportion of people who are alive for a designated time (usually 5 years) after a cancer diagnosis divided by the proportion of people of similar age, race, etc. expected to be alive in the absence of cancer based on normal life expectancy. Relative survival does not distinguish between patients who have no evidence of cancer and those who have relapsed or are still in treatment; nor does it represent the proportion of people who are cured, because cancer death can occur beyond 5 years after diagnosis. For information about how survival rates were calculated for this report, see Sources of Statistics on page 67.

Although relative survival rates provide some indication about the average experience of cancer patients, they should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, 5-year survival rates do not reflect the most recent advances in detection and treatment because they are based on patients who were diagnosed at least several years in the past. Second, they do not account for many factors that influence individual survival, such as access to treatment, other illnesses, and biological or behavioral differences. Third, improvements in survival rates over time do not always indicate progress against cancer. For example, increases in average survival rates occur when screening results in the detection of cancers that would never have caused harm if left undetected (overdiagnosis).

---

**Figure 2. Trends in Age-adjusted Cancer Death Rates* by Site, Females, US, 1930-2017**

*Per 100,000, age adjusted to the 2000 US standard population. Rates exclude deaths in Puerto Rico and other US territories. †Uterus refers to uterine cervix and uterine corpus combined. ‡The mortality rate for liver cancer is increasing. Note: Due to changes in ICD coding, numerator information has changed over time. Rates for cancers of the liver, lung and bronchus, colon and rectum, and uterus are affected by these coding changes.