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## Cancer Deaths Down Since 'War on Cancer'

### Cancer Death Rates Drop 6% in Women, 11% in Men Since 1971's 'War on Cancer' Began

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March 10, 2010 -- The U.S. is making gains on at least one war front, the "War on [Cancer](#)," according to a new analysis of cancer death statistics.

Researchers found cancer deaths have dropped by 11% in men and 6% in women since 1971, when President Nixon signed the National Cancer Act declaring a "War on Cancer."

Although cancer death rates rose during the first two decades of the cancer war, peaking in 1990, researchers say since then there has been a major downturn in cancer deaths, thanks largely to reductions in tobacco use, improvements in cancer screening to allow for early detection, and advances in cancer treatment.

"Contrary to the pessimistic news from the popular media, overall cancer death rates have decreased substantially in both men and women, whether measured against baseline rates in 1970/71 when the National Cancer Act was signed by President Nixon or when measured against the peak rates in 1990/91," write researcher Ahmedin Jemal of the American Cancer Society and colleagues in *PLoS ONE*.

Researchers say cancer death rates have been dropping steadily since the early 1990s, but some reports have declared the war on cancer a failure because of limited improvement in cancer death rates overall since 1971. But they say many of these analyses do not account for the dramatic increase in tobacco-related cancers in the latter part of the 20th century.

[Assess Your Risk for the 5 Most Common Cancers](#)

#### Measuring Progress on the War on Cancer

In the study, researchers analyzed cancer death statistics for all cancers combined, the four most common cancers ([lung](#), colorectal, [prostate](#) in men, and breast in women), and cancers of 15 different sites from 1970 to 2006, using the SEER\*Stat database, which reports long-term cancer trends.

The results showed that for all cancers combined, cancer death rates for men increased from 249.3 deaths per 100,000 in 1970 to 279.8 in 1990 and then decreased to 221.1 in 2006, a drop of 21% since the peak year of 1990 and 11% since 1970.

In women, the cancer death rate for all cancers increased from 163.0 in 1970 to 175.3 in 1991 (the peak year) and then decreased to 153.7 in 2006, which is a decline of 12% and 6%, respectively.

Overall, the decrease in cancer death rates since 1990-1991 represent a total of 561,400 prevented cancer deaths in men and 205,700 prevented cancer deaths in women.

Researchers say the decline in cancer deaths involved all age groups and racial/ethnic groups. However, black men and women still have cancer death rates 20%-50% higher than whites.

Death rates decreased for 15 of the 19 cancer sites studied, including the four major cancers. In fact, researchers say reductions in cancer death rates from the four major cancer sites accounted for 60%-80% of the total decrease in cancer death rates since 1990-1991.

Cancer deaths increased for esophageal cancer and [melanoma](#) in men, liver cancer in men and women, and [pancreatic cancer](#) in women.