Surviving Cancer

Five-year relative survival is improving for patients with any of the four most common cancers in Ontario.

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<td>Five-year relative survival rates</td>
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What's new this year?

Slightly different methods (different inclusion criteria, updated life table) have been used this year to calculate survival. Survival estimates for cancers diagnosed in 1997–1999 are shown for the four most common cancers. As well, survival estimates for the 13 most common cancers (according to incidence frequencies for 2004) are shown (excluding bladder cancer, for which comparisons are difficult because of classification changes over time).

See table on next page.
Cancer Survival - by type

5-year relative survival for the four most common cancers diagnosed in Ontario, 1997-1999

Source: Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Cancer Registry, December 2006
What do the results show?

- For patients diagnosed with cancer in Ontario in the period 1997–1999, five-year relative survival in the four most common cancers (Figure 1) was:
  - Highest for prostate (94%) and breast cancer (87%)
  - Lowest for lung cancer (15% for men, 19% for women)
  - Around 60% for colorectal cancer in both men and women

- Five-year relative survival has improved over the past decade for most cancers, with the greatest improvements being seen for prostate and breast cancers. Figure 2

- Survival from cancer of the lung and of the pancreas is low and shows little improvement over the past decade; stomach cancer survival is also low, but has improved. Figure 2

- Improvements over time in survival may be partly related to the
existence of more and better cancer screening services (e.g. the Ontario Breast Screening Program) and/or due to the detection of small or slow-growing cancers that would otherwise not have been diagnosed or not have affected a person’s survival during their lifetime. For example, the apparently large increase in prostate cancer survival is probably due to increased screening with the PSA test.

Why is this important to Ontarians?

• Measuring how long people with different types of cancer live after their diagnosis helps us understand:
  o Differences in severity between one type of cancer and another
  o The effectiveness of cancer treatments, early detection, and screening activities

How does Ontario compare?

• Ontario’s five-year relative survival rates for breast and colorectal cancers are similar to most provinces. Ontario's lung cancer survival rates are statistically significantly higher for lung cancer than those of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia. Ontario’s survival rates for prostate cancer are also higher than those of Saskatchewan and Alberta.
  • Ontario's five-year relative survival rates are generally similar to those of the U.S. and slightly higher than those of Europe. ..

What is being done?

• Screening can detect cancers earlier, when treatments can be more effective.
  o Ontario’s Cancer Prevention and Screening Council, established by Cancer Care Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society, is working toward breast and cervical screening targets set out in Cancer 2020 (an action plan for cancer detection and prevention).
  o The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Cancer Care Ontario have introduced a provincial colorectal cancer screening program to start in spring 2007._
• Promoting advances in cancer treatment improves rates of survival.
  o Cancer Care Ontario's Program in Evidence-Based Care provides up-to-date expert recommendations on appropriate treatment for different types of cancer based on the latest available scientific evidence.
  o The Ontario Cancer Research Network supports research to
develop promising scientific discoveries into new cancer therapies and promotes clinical trials of new therapies.

**Technical Information**

**Definition**

- Five-year relative survival is the proportion of people alive five years after their diagnosis, adjusted for the mortality expected for people of the same age in the general population of Ontario. For example, women diagnosed with breast cancer in the period 1997–1999 in Ontario had a five-year relative survival rate of 87%. This means that these women were 87% as likely to live five more years as other Ontario women of the same age.
- Calculations are based on first primary cancers diagnosed in Ontario residents, excluding patients of unknown age at diagnosis and individuals whose date of diagnosis is their date of death (that is, who were only diagnosed at or following death).
- Relative survival is a useful population-based indicator of the burden of cancer and the variation in severity of different types of cancer. It does not necessarily reflect a person’s chances of surviving for a given time after diagnosis.

**Data Sources**

- Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Cancer Registry

**Limitations**

- Interpretation of temporal trends must be done with caution because of changes in diagnostic practices and/or cancer coding and registration rules.
- Ontario reporting of cancers by stage at diagnosis is not sufficiently complete to allow for analysis of stage-specific survival.

**Notes**

5. http://www.cancercare.on.ca/index_colorectalScreening.htm
7. http://www.ocrn.on.ca/