

# Age affects risk of being diagnosed with cancer at advanced stage

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Older women with breast cancer face a higher risk of being diagnosed with the disease at a late stage, while the risk of an advanced stage diagnosis of lung cancer decreases with age, a new study shows today.

Researchers from the University of Cambridge and the Eastern Cancer Registration and Information Centre (ECRIC) said the study showed that efforts to diagnose cancer early need to be better tailored to different [age groups](#).

The study, published in the [British Journal of Cancer](#), used ECRIC data on stage - a measure of how advanced the cancer is when diagnosed.

The research aimed to find whether there was a link between age or socio-economic background and being diagnosed with advanced stage cancer.

Researchers looked at around 17,800 [women](#) with breast cancer and over 13,200 patients with [lung cancer](#) in the east of England who were diagnosed between 2006 and 2009.

They found that compared to women aged 65-69, women aged 70-74 had a 21 per cent increased chance of a late stage breast cancer diagnosis.

The chance of an advanced breast cancer diagnosis became higher as women got older - even accounting for the effect of screening. For example, it was 46 per cent higher in women aged 75-79.

In contrast, it was less likely that older patients would be diagnosed with advanced stage lung cancer than younger patients.

Compared with people aged 65-69, people aged 70-74 were 18 per cent less likely of be diagnosed with late stage lung cancer and this chance decreased further with age - for people aged 75-79 it was 26 per cent lower.

For breast cancer, the study also found that late stage diagnosis was more common in women from deprived backgrounds. For lung cancer, late stage diagnosis was more common in men.

Dr. Georgios Lyratzopoulos, study author based at the University of Cambridge, said: "Patient awareness of the signs of breast cancer is known to be lower among older women and this may explain why breast cancer is diagnosed later among this age group.

"But it is puzzling why older patients have a lower risk of advanced stage lung cancer. More research is needed to better understand this pattern."

The researchers added that the strong likelihood of [older women](#) being diagnosed with late stage [breast cancer](#) was worrying given that the risk of the disease increases with age.

Dr. David Greenberg, study author based at ECRIC, said: "Collecting staging data has proved difficult in the past but this data is vital to understanding how to improve the diagnosis of cancer. ECRIC has the most complete information on stage. A modernisation programme for cancer registries aims to improve the collection of such information nationwide by end of 2012."

Sara Hiom, director of information at Cancer Research UK, said: "If cancer is caught early, patients usually have a better chance of beating the disease as more effective treatment options are available.

"We have made great progress in improving cancer survival rates in the last 40 years, but there is still more work to be done to help more people survive [cancer](#)."

"Collecting information on stage at diagnosis is vital to do this and we must think how to target messages appropriately to the right audiences."

**More information:** Lyratzopoulos, G et al.,  
Variation in advanced stage at diagnosis of lung  
and female breast cancer in an English region  
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