

90 percent approve of cancer screening but screening uptake is lower

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Nine in 10 people think that cancer screening is 'almost always a good idea' despite the fact that screening uptake is lower, a Cancer Research UK study in the *British Journal of Cancer* shows.

The researchers, from Cancer Research UK's Health Behaviour Research Centre at University College London (UCL), interviewed almost 1,900 people aged 50-80 years old about their views on cancer screening.

They found that people in the UK are overwhelmingly positive about cancer screening, with half of all people (49 per cent) saying that they would even want to be tested for a cancer if it was incurable.

Three in five people (59 per cent) also deemed it irresponsible to not take part in cancer screening.

But people were much less knowledgeable about the risks of screening. Half (49 per cent) were unaware that some cancers are slow-growing and unlikely to cause any problems during the person's lifetime.

Screening - especially breast screening - can pick up these cancers leading to people being treated unnecessarily as well as enduring the shock of being diagnosed with cancer even though it would never have harmed them. Despite this 45 per cent of those asked said they would want to be screened for these cancers.

The researchers highlighted the difficulties this causes in helping people understand the balance of risks and benefits, and promoting informed decision making about cancer screening.

In the UK there are national screening programmes for cervical, breast and bowel cancer. In England, 58 per cent of people take up bowel screening, 78 per cent take up [cervical screening](#), and 77 per cent take up [breast screening](#).

Lead researcher Dr Jo Waller, said: "It's great that people are enthusiastic about cancer screening, and if people are keen to be screened, we need to minimise any barriers. But it's also important to remember that taking part in screening is an individual choice, and if someone decides that screening is not for them after considering the benefits and harms then that choice should be respected."

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "This research shows that people feel positive about screening for cancer. But it's vital that the benefits and harms of screening options are clearly explained to people, so they can make a fully informed choice."

In the lead up to this year's General Election Cancer Research UK is calling on candidates from all parties to back measures to improve early diagnosis of [cancer](#) in our Cross Cancer Out campaign. The Government should ensure accurate information is provided on the risks and benefits of all [cancer screening](#) to help people make informed decisions alongside specific efforts

to increase the low uptake of [bowel screening](#).

More information: Waller et al. Enthusiasm for cancer screening in Great Britain: a general population survey. *British Journal of Cancer*. DOI: [10.1038/bjc.2014.643](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2014.643) .
[www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v11 ...
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Provided by Cancer Research UK

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