

## Study finds most adult survivors of childhood cancer cope well, but some are susceptible to symptoms of depression

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The majority of adult survivors of childhood cancer reported no or few symptoms of psychological distress over a 13 year follow-up period according to a study published in the *British Journal of Cancer*, today (Wednesday).

The results indicated that at least 65 per cent of adult survivors of childhood cancer remained free of elevated symptoms of [psychological distress](#) over the course of the study and a further 15 per cent showed initial signs of distress, but this decreased during the follow up period.

But 10 per cent of respondents felt increasing levels of anxiety over time and another one in ten experienced persistently high levels of depressive symptoms throughout the 13 year study, particularly by those who reported worsening health later in life.

Researchers from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Tennessee investigated more than 4,500 adult survivors of childhood cancer\* who completed a questionnaire on three separate occasions between 1994 and 2010.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that psychological distress may emerge decades after a child's original [cancer diagnosis](#).

Tara Brinkman, lead author of the study, said: "Our results found that

most [childhood cancer survivors](#) don't report significant psychological distress. However, symptoms of distress can fluctuate over time which may be related to late effects of childhood [cancer therapy](#).

"These findings have important implications for screening practices as survivors who experience increasing distress over time may be missed by a single assessment. Routine screening of adult survivors of childhood cancer for signs of psychological distress could play a crucial role in improving [mental health care](#) for these survivors."

Martin Ledwick, Cancer Research UK's head information nurse, said: "This is ultimately good news, as most adult survivors of childhood cancer are not directly stressed as a result of their ordeal later in life.

"But the study draws attention to the fact that too many survivors are susceptible to depression and GPs should be aware of signs of increasing distress among survivors."

**More information:** Brinkman, TM et al. (2013) Longitudinal patterns of psychological distress in adult survivors of childhood cancer, *British Journal of Cancer* (2013), 1–9. [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2013.428](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2013.428)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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