

# Non-Hodgkin lymphoma survival doubles since early 1970s

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More than half of patients diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL) are now surviving the disease thanks to improved diagnosis and treatment, according to a new report<sup>1</sup> from Cancer Research UK.

The report, co-authored with the Haematological [Malignancy](#) Research Network (HMRN) and supported by Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research, shows that NHL rates have doubled since the early 1970s, when less than a quarter survived their disease for at least 10 years. And it predicts more than half of those diagnosed today will survive the disease for this long.

These vast improvements are largely thanks to better treatments –

particularly the drug rituximab, which Cancer Research UK scientists laid the groundwork for with their early work into the immune system – and earlier [diagnosis](#) linked to improved understanding of the disease.

Non-Hodgkin lymphomas are a group of diseases that affect white blood cells – the cells that normally defend the body against infection. In NHL patients, these cells stop working properly, too many are produced and they can collect together to form tumours. The causes of NHL remain largely unknown, although problems with the immune system are thought to be involved.

Dr Russell Patmore, consultant haematologist at Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust and one of the report's authors, said: "Years of research have improved our understanding of NHL and how best to treat it. We now know there are more than 20 sub-types of the disease, each with their own distinct patterns of incidence and prognosis. And by knowing which type we're dealing with, treatment can be tailored so it has the greatest benefit to patients."

The Cancer Research UK report also presents the first population-based estimates of survival for some of the sub-types of the disease.

The analysis reveals huge variation by NHL sub-type. For example, patients diagnosed with mantle cell lymphoma – a rare but aggressive sub-type – have only a one in four chance of surviving for more than five years.

By contrast, around nine in 10 people diagnosed with follicular lymphoma, which is more common and develops more slowly, survive for at least five years.

Dr Patmore added: "When we know the type of lymphoma we're dealing with, we can use more targeted therapies like rituximab. This has been

one of the key drugs for NHL patients in recent years and is largely responsible for the survival improvements in the more common forms of the disease.

"It's important that future research focuses on early detection and classification of [lymphoma](#) sub-types, as well as improving the quality of life for people living with the disease."

NHL is the sixth most common cancer in the UK, with more than 12,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Catherine Thomson, head of statistics at Cancer Research UK, said: "This report presents the first population-based estimates of survival by sub-type and we're seeing there are clear differences in outlook depending on which sub-type you have.

"As well as disease type, we know that age, sex and the stage at which you're diagnosed all play their parts in predicting the chances of survival. But the overall picture is positive compared with the early 1970s and research is helping to improve things today.

"Our researchers made major contributions to the early understanding of the [immune system](#) and their work laid the foundations for the development of rituximab, which is now the first-line treatment for most NHL patients."

**More information:** Cancer Research UK (2013) Cancer Statistics Report: Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas - UK:  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org/cance ... ncerstats/types/nhl/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cance...ncerstats/types/nhl/)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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