# New evidence shows quitting smoking can dramatically boost cancer survival rates



New research published in the Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network has brought encouraging news for people diagnosed with cancer who smoke: quitting smoking can significantly improve survival rates even at advanced stages of the disease. The study tracked more than 13,000 cancer patients over two years and found that those who stopped smoking within six months of their cancer diagnosis had a 97% lower risk of dying compared to those who continued smoking. This survival advantage was consistent across all cancer types and stages, reinforcing the vital role of smoking cessation in cancer care.

According to the lead author, Dr Steven Tohmasi, the findings illustrate that lifestyle changes such as stopping smoking can prolong survival more effectively than some chemotherapies. He advocates for smoking cessation to be recognised as the "fourth pillar" of cancer treatment, alongside surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy or immunotherapy. Senior author Dr Li-Shiun Chen emphasises that quitting smoking is beneficial at any stage of illness — even for those with the most advanced cancers. "It is never too late, and no one is ever ‘too sick’ to quit smoking," she said.

This research is supported by evidence from other leading cancer centres. For example, a study at MD Anderson Cancer Center found that patients who quit smoking within six months of diagnosis reduced cancer-related mortality by 22% to 26%, with the most substantial survival improvement seen in those who maintained abstinence after initially quitting. Survival increased from an average of 2.1 years for continuing smokers to 3.9 years for those who quit.

Further modelling by UNSW Australia demonstrated that quitting smoking post-diagnosis could add several months to over two years to patients' lifespans, depending on cancer type and severity. The earlier the cessation, the greater the benefits, but quitting at any point post-diagnosis still yields survival gains.

Beyond survival time, the Irish Cancer Society highlights important improvements in treatment outcomes tied to smoking cessation. Quitting can lead to better treatment success, fewer and less severe side effects, quicker recovery, lower risks of secondary cancers, and an overall enhanced quality of life. Conversely, continuing to smoke may worsen side effects from surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

Mayo Clinic experts add that smoking can reduce the effectiveness of cancer treatments and increase the chance of recurrence. Quitting smoking not only improves the body's response to chemotherapy and radiation therapy but also boosts heart and lung health, lowers blood pressure, and enhances physical stamina—all vital for coping with cancer and its treatment.

The significance of quitting smoking for lung cancer patients is particularly well-documented. Lung cancer remains one of the most common and deadly cancers, with smoking responsible for over 70% of cases in the UK. According to a study by the National Cancer Institute, lung cancer patients who quit smoking after diagnosis had notably improved survival rates: 75% of quitters were alive after three years compared to 66% of continuing smokers, and after five years, survival was 61% versus 49%. This mandates a consistent effort by clinicians to encourage all lung cancer patients to quit smoking regardless of their disease stage or treatment.

Public health initiatives like the NHS's Stoptober campaign aim to encourage quitting, yet recent data suggests smoking rates may be rising in some parts of England, highlighting the ongoing challenge. The UK government has also introduced targeted lung cancer screening programmes designed to detect illness earlier and improve prognosis.

Taken together, the accumulating evidence crystallises a crucial paradigm shift in cancer care: smoking cessation must be integrated as a standard part of treatment plans to maximise survival and improve quality of life for people with cancer. As Dr Chen puts it, tobacco treatment should no longer be seen as optional but as essential to comprehensive oncology care. This message offers hope and empowerment to patients, reinforcing that it is never too late to quit smoking and gain the significant survival benefits it can bring.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/quit-smoking-benefits-cancer-diagnosis-b2843204.html), [[4]](https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2025/03/never-too-late-quitting-smoking-after-cancer-diagnosis-boosts-survival-rates-modelling-shows)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/quit-smoking-benefits-cancer-diagnosis-b2843204.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.mdanderson.org/newsroom/quitting-smoking-after-cancer-diagnosis-improves-survival-across-wide-variety-cancers.h00-159701490.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2025/03/never-too-late-quitting-smoking-after-cancer-diagnosis-boosts-survival-rates-modelling-shows)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-support/coping-with-cancer/information-for-patients/quitting-smoking-after-a-cancer-diagnosis)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-clinic-q-and-a-why-you-should-quit-smoking-even-after-a-cancer-diagnosis/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/quit-smoking-benefits-cancer-diagnosis-b2843204.html), [[7]](https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2021/lung-cancer-quitting-smoking-improves-survival)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/quit-smoking-benefits-cancer-diagnosis-b2843204.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/quit-smoking-benefits-cancer-diagnosis-b2843204.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.mdanderson.org/newsroom/quitting-smoking-after-cancer-diagnosis-improves-survival-across-wide-variety-cancers.h00-159701490.html> - A study by MD Anderson Cancer Center found that cancer patients who quit smoking within six months of diagnosis experienced a 22%-26% reduction in cancer-related mortality. The best outcomes were observed in patients who started tobacco treatment within six months of diagnosis and remained abstinent from smoking three months later, with survival increasing from 2.1 years for smokers to 3.9 years for abstainers. This underscores the critical role of early smoking cessation as a key clinical intervention for patients undergoing cancer treatment.
3. <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/benefits-of-quitting-smoking-over-time> - The American Cancer Society outlines the health benefits of quitting smoking over time, noting that it's never too late to quit. Within minutes of smoking the last cigarette, the body begins to recover. Over time, quitting smoking reduces the risk of various cancers, including lung, mouth, throat, and bladder cancers. Additionally, quitting lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, and lung disease, and can add as much as 10 years to life expectancy.
4. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2025/03/never-too-late-quitting-smoking-after-cancer-diagnosis-boosts-survival-rates-modelling-shows> - Research from UNSW Australia indicates that quitting smoking after a cancer diagnosis can significantly improve survival rates. The study found that Australians who quit smoking post-diagnosis could live from several months to more than two years longer than those who continued smoking, depending on cancer type and severity. The earlier one quits, the more beneficial it is, but quitting at any stage post-diagnosis can make a difference.
5. <https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-support/coping-with-cancer/information-for-patients/quitting-smoking-after-a-cancer-diagnosis> - The Irish Cancer Society emphasizes that quitting smoking after a cancer diagnosis can improve treatment outcomes and overall health. Benefits include a better chance of successful treatment, fewer and less serious side effects from cancer treatment, faster recovery, lower risk of secondary cancers, and improved quality of life. Continuing to smoke increases the risk of worse side effects from surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.
6. <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-clinic-q-and-a-why-you-should-quit-smoking-even-after-a-cancer-diagnosis/> - Mayo Clinic experts highlight the importance of quitting smoking after a cancer diagnosis. Smoking can make cancer treatments less effective and increase the risk of recurrence. Quitting smoking can positively affect cancer treatment by reducing side effects and improving the body's response to chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Additionally, quitting smoking can dramatically improve heart and lung health, lower blood pressure, and increase physical stamina.
7. <https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2021/lung-cancer-quitting-smoking-improves-survival> - A study by the National Cancer Institute found that lung cancer patients who quit smoking after diagnosis had improved survival rates. At three years post-diagnosis, 75% of those who quit smoking were alive, compared to 66% of those who continued smoking. At five years, 61% of quitters were alive, compared to 49% of non-quitters. These findings suggest that all patients with lung cancer should be encouraged to quit smoking during each visit after diagnosis, regardless of the stage of their tumors, smoking intensity, and treatment status.