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50+: Live Better, Longer Death Rates Drop for 5 Top Causes of Death

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Oct. 10, 2012 -- Death rates dropped significantly last year for five out of the 15 leading causes of death in the U.S., according to a new CDC report.

Researchers say a major decline in three of the top five causes of death, including [heart disease](#), [cancer](#), and [stroke](#), contributed to a slight decline in the rate of overall deaths in 2011.

The report also shows the death rate, which accounts for changes in the age distribution of the country, reached a record low in 2011.

But the average American's life expectancy remained the same at 78.7 years from 2010 to 2011.

Death Rates Drop for Top Causes

Researchers say the 3% decline in heart disease deaths and 2.4% drop in cancer-related deaths were especially significant because deaths from these two diseases accounted for 47% of all deaths in the U.S. in 2011.

The report shows the ranking of the leading 15 causes of death stayed relatively the same from 2010 to 2011, although [kidney](#)-related causes of death (ranked No. 8 in 2010) and [influenza/pneumonia](#) (ranked No. 9 in 2010) exchanged ranks, as indicated below.

Death rates increased for six other major causes of death.

Top 15 Causes of Death (% change from 2010 to 2011):

1. Heart disease (-3%)
2. Cancer (-2.4%)
3. Chronic lower respiratory diseases, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, [emphysema](#), and [bronchitis](#) (+1.2%)
4. Stroke (-3.1%)
5. Accidents or unintentional injuries (unchanged)
6. Alzheimer's disease (-2%)
7. [Diabetes](#) (+3.4%)
8. Influenza and pneumonia (+4%)
9. Kidney-related diseases, including nephritis, [nephrotic syndrome](#), and nephrosis (-12.4%)
10. [Suicide](#) (-0.8%)

11. Septicemia, an infection of the blood that affects the whole body (-0.9%)
12. Chronic [liver](#) disease and [cirrhosis](#) (+3.2%)
13. [High blood pressure](#) or hypertension (unchanged)
14. Parkinson's disease (+2.9%)
15. Pneumonitis or inflammation of the lungs (+3.9%)

Researchers say the 12% drop in deaths due to kidney-related disorders should be interpreted with caution because changes in coding and classification contributed to this decrease.

Although [HIV](#) was not among the 15 leading causes of death in 2011, researchers say it remains a public health concern, especially among those 15-64 years old. The death rate for HIV decreased by 7.7% from 2010 to 2011.

Death Rates by Gender Dip, Too

The report also shows the death rate reached a record low of 740.6 deaths per 100,000 people in 2011, 0.9% lower than the 2010 rate of 747 per 100,000 people.

The death rate dropped by 1.4% for men and 0.5% for women from 2010 to 2011.

The average life expectancy for women increased slightly by 0.1 year for both men and women, from 76.2 to 76.3 years for men and from 81 to 81.1 years for women.

But researchers say overall life expectancy remained unchanged due to rounding.

Infant deaths or the infant mortality rate also remained unchanged from 2010 to 2011.

The preliminary statistics report is based on state death records for 2011.

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SOURCE:

National Vital Statistics Reports: "Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2011."
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