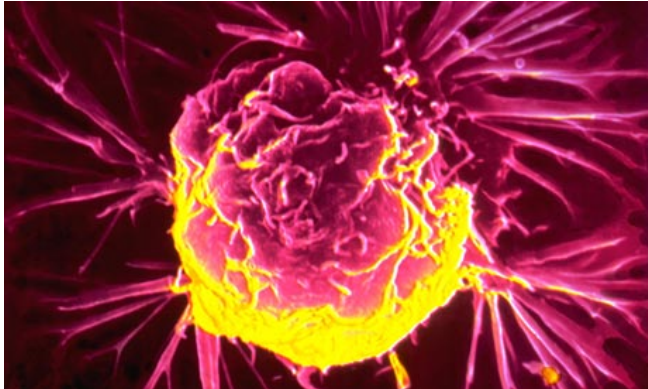


# Taller women more likely to develop cancer

Study of women between 5ft and 5ft 9in tall finds chances of developing cancer rise by 16% for every 10cm in height

**Denis Campbell**, health correspondent  
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An electron micrograph of a breast cancer cell. Research has found that for every extra 4in in height, a woman's risk of breast cancer rises by 17%. Photograph: NCI/Phototake/Alamy

Taller people are more likely to develop some of the commonest and deadliest cancers, the largest study of links between height and the disease has concluded.

A woman's chances of developing [cancer](#) rose by 16% for every extra 10cm (4in) in height, found the study, which looked at 97,000 women with the disease between 5ft and 5ft 9in tall.

Although height is known to affect cancer risk, this latest research in the *Lancet Oncology* shows that taller women have a higher risk of getting at least 10 types of cancer, more than previously thought. They include breast, bowel, ovarian and skin cancer, leukaemia and malignant melanoma.

In females of average height, the overall incidence is 850 cancers per 100,000 women per year. In those around 5ft tall it is 750 cancers per 100,000 women per year. But in those around 5ft 9in, it is about 1,000 cancers per 100,000 women per year.

Researchers led by Dr Jane Green, of Oxford University's cancer epidemiology unit, found that for every extra 4in in height, the risk of breast cancer rose by 17%, of ovarian cancer by the same, and of womb cancer by 19%. The exact reason for the link is unclear, and being tall has also been associated with a lower risk of other conditions, notably heart disease. Green's team suggested two theories: that hormones linked to growth in childhood could also result in a greater risk of cancer in later years; and that tall people simply have more chance of cancerous cell changes because they have more cells.

"The most likely explanation is that hormonal changes that are related to tallness in women may also be related to growth abnormalities, especially in the breast, that lead to cancer," said Professor Karol Sikora, the medical director of CancerPartnersUK private treatment centres. "Dietary factors may also be important, especially in relation to the dramatic rise in the incidence of colorectal cancer in tall women."

Sara Hiom of Cancer Research UK said: "Tall people should not be alarmed by these results. Most people are not a lot taller than average, and their height will have only a small effect on their cancer risk."

Official data showed that 264,679 people were diagnosed with cancer in England in 2009 – 9,870 more than the year before. Of those, 134,636 were in men (up 5.1%) and 130,043 in women (up 2.6%). Experts last week revised their estimate of how many people will get cancer in their lifetime from about a third to 42%, because of ageing, obesity and other factors.  
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