

# ??? 20 top causes of death in Australia ???

Heart disease and stroke remain the leading causes of death in Australia, despite great progress over the last decade, according to [latest figures](#) from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Dementia has meanwhile overtaken lung cancer to claim third spot, responsible for 10,369 deaths in 2012.

At the less-common end of the spectrum, 38 people were killed by firearms (excluding self-harm), three were killed by venomous snakes and lizards, one by a dog and one by a crocodile or alligator. One person was killed by lightning.

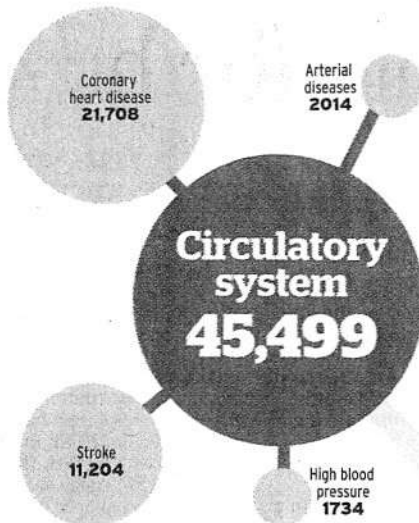
Together, the top 20 disease groups were responsible for 67% of all deaths in Australia in 2012.

***See the full list below:***

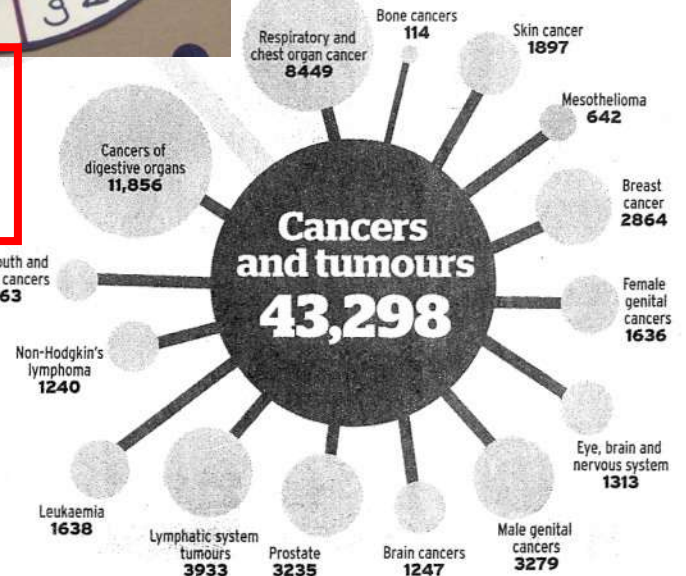
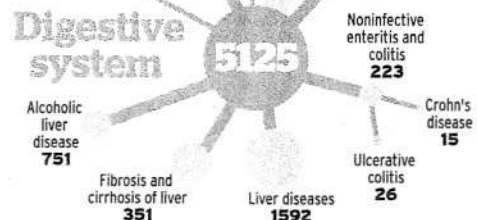
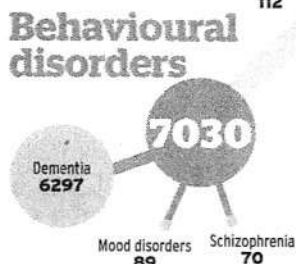
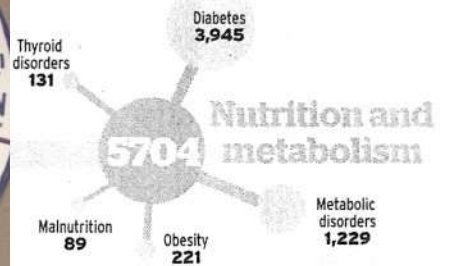
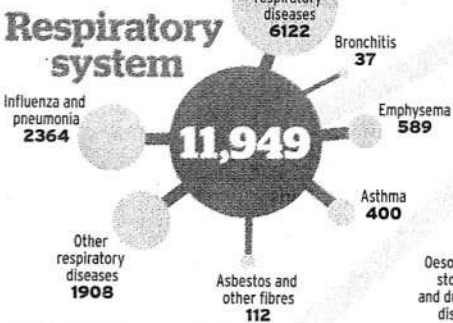
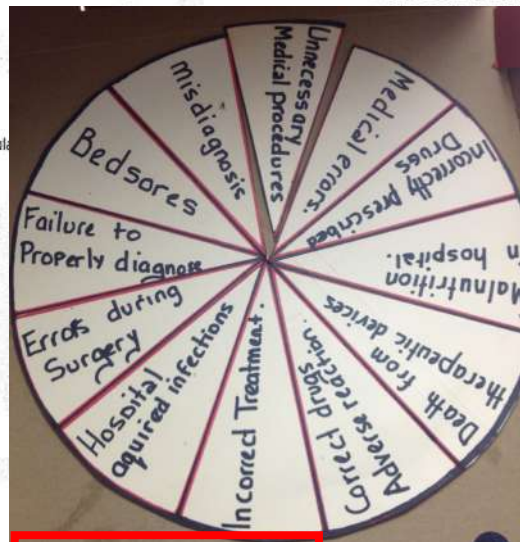
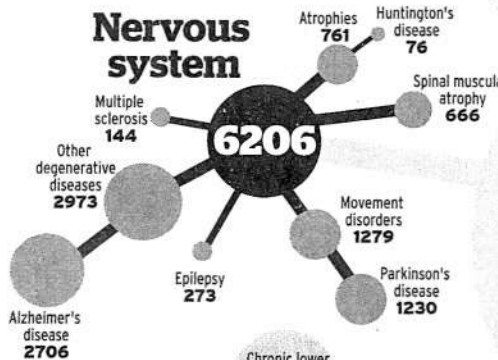
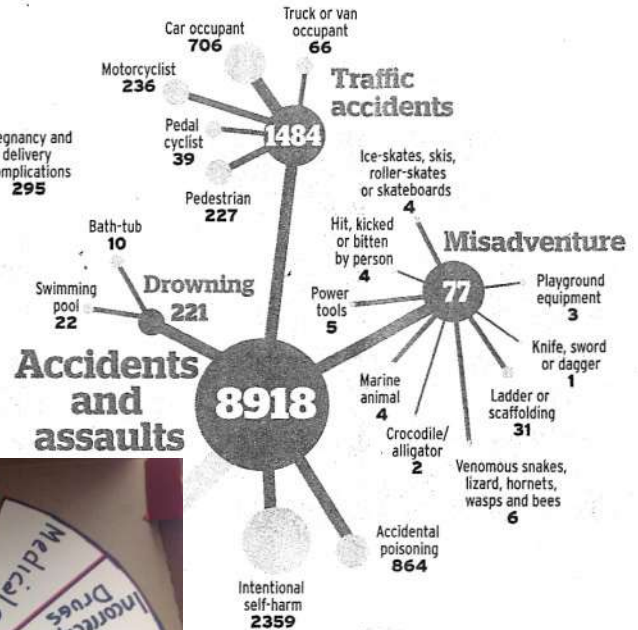
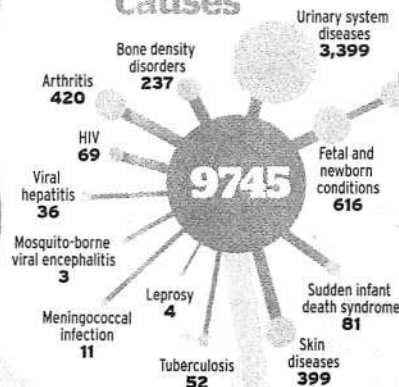
Disease	Rank in 2012	No. of deaths	Rank in 2003	No. of deaths
Ischaemic heart disease	1	20,046	1	25,439
Cerebrovascular disease	2	10,779	2	12,240
Dementia	3	10,369	6	4,275
Lung and tracheal cancer	4	8,137	3	6,976
Chronic lower respiratory disease	5	6,649	4	5,985
Diabetes	6	4,239	9	3,389
Colorectal cancer	7	4,051	5	4,447
Blood and lymph cancer	8	4,001	7	3,712
Diseases of the urinary system	9	3,711	11	2,922
Heart failure	10	3,489	10	2,988
Prostate cancer	11	3,079	12	2,842
Breast cancer	12	2,819	13	2,722
Influenza and pneumonia	13	2,719	8	3,566
Suicide, intentional self-harm	14	2,535	14	2,213
Pancreatic cancer	15	2,524	15	1,902
Skin cancer	16	2,036	17	1,527
Accidental falls	17	1,997	37	709
Hypertensive disease	18	1,858	19	1,364
Cardiac arrhythmias	19	1,720	24	1,102
Cirrhosis and other liver disease	20	1,547	18	1,390

So how did the ABS miss Australia's iatrogenic epidemic; John Archer's guesstimate of 50,000 deaths per year arising from medical treatment as distinct from the patient's disorder.

# WAYS TO DIE *'In 20 years we will be wondering why we did so little on obesity'*



### Other internal causes



SELECTED STATISTICS FROM 2010 ABS DATA COMPILED BY CONRAD WALTERS. NOT ALL CATEGORIES INCLUDED.

# Statistics reveal how life determines death

BY AMY CORDEROY

**IT TELLS us as much about life as it does about death. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death data paints a picture of nearly 150,000 lives that came to an end in 2010. Some lingered, some disappeared in the blink of an eye.**

More than 43,000 people were taken by cancer, even more by heart disease.

Four people died ice-skating, skiing, roller-skating or skateboarding. And six came to an end after a run-in with snakes, lizards, hornets, wasps or bees.

Many people drowned or fell from ladders. Many more died violently through assault or in a road accident.

Derek Williamson spends his days leading tours though the history of death in his role as director of the Museum of Human Disease at the University of NSW.

As he walks among the samples on display – diseased arteries, cirrhotic livers, even an ovarian tumour grown out of confused cells that allowed it to sprout hair and teeth – he sees warnings for the living.

“Really, so much of this is about quality of life. Long before you die from lung cancer, smoking has affected your life in so many ways,” Mr Williamson said.

He said nowadays our biggest killers are self-inflicted. “Twenty years ago, we didn’t worry about most people in the population getting diabetes, it was the few people who were born with it.”

Childhood has become safer, though, with vaccination programs virtually eliminating diseases like measles and diphtheria.

A big cut in smoking, a better diet and improvements in traffic safety have meant far bigger improvements in life expectancy for Australians than



See an interactive graphic.

for people in countries such as America, according to the director of the Centre for Burden of Disease and Cost-effectiveness at the University of Queensland, Theo Vos.

In 1970, in the US and Australia, a 15-year-old youth had a similar chance of dying before the age of 60 – about 23 per cent in the US and just more than 21 per cent here. Today, these statistics have decreased to only 8 per cent in Australia but is still up about 14 per cent in the US, according to an online database the University of Queensland developed with the University of Washington.

“Homicides are a substantial proportion of the injuries in the US, whereas you can hardly see the homicides in the Australian figures,” Professor Vos said. “And when it comes to ischaemic heart disease, we have continued to improve, whereas the US seems to have subsided in the past 10 years.”

Despite this good news, death in Australia can be controversial. The director of the Research Centre for Injury Studies at Flinders University, James Harrison, said the recording of suicides has been a hot issue.

“The statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2000 to 2010 seemed

as if the suicide rate was declining really sharply,” Professor Harrison said. “But when we and others looked at it closely, it looked like there was something misleading in the data.”

The ABS has made changes to try to fix the problems (which largely stem from the ways each coroner chooses to record, or rather not record, suicide deaths), but it is still a controversial topic.

When the last suicide data came out, along with a glowing release pointing to a fall in rates since 2001, mental health experts called the bureau “unhelpful” and its release “spin”.

Death, like life, cannot escape politics.

So what will the figures look like in 20 years? A report by experts from the University of Western Australia estimated that if current upward trends in obesity continued, Australians aged about 20 years would be the first generation to see their life expectancy fall.

The director of Curtin University’s Public Health Advocacy Institute, Mike Daube, believes we will continue to see a decrease in deaths from tobacco.

“Because of their later uptake of smoking, we are only now starting to see the declines in female mortality,” he said. “But in 20 years we will be wondering why we did so little on obesity. Diabetes and all these problems caused by obesity, I think they are going to be looking catastrophic. The crisis then is not going to be in emergency departments but in chronic conditions”.

Advances in surgical techniques and new drugs can only do so much. In the end, it is the way people live their lives that will determine how they die.

For help or information call Suicide Helpline Victoria on 1300 651 251 or Lifeline on 131 114, or visit [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au).

