

ORIGINAL

Causes of death in the Balearic Islands: the fight against them

Causas de mortalidad en las Islas Baleares: la lucha contra ellas

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Received: 8 - VII - 2023

Accepted: 7 - VIII - 2023

doi: 10.3306/AJHS.2023.38.06.79

Summary

Based on the most current preventive proposals and taking into account the mortality data in the Balearic Islands, the possible preventive actions against the diseases that cause more mortality and their situation in our Community are discussed.

Key words: Causes death, Balearic Islands.

Resumen

A partir de las propuestas preventivas más actuales y teniendo en cuenta los datos de mortalidad en Baleares, se discuten las posibles actuaciones preventivas frente a las enfermedades que causan más mortalidad y su situación en nuestra Comunidad.

Palabras clave: Causas muerte, Islas Baleares.

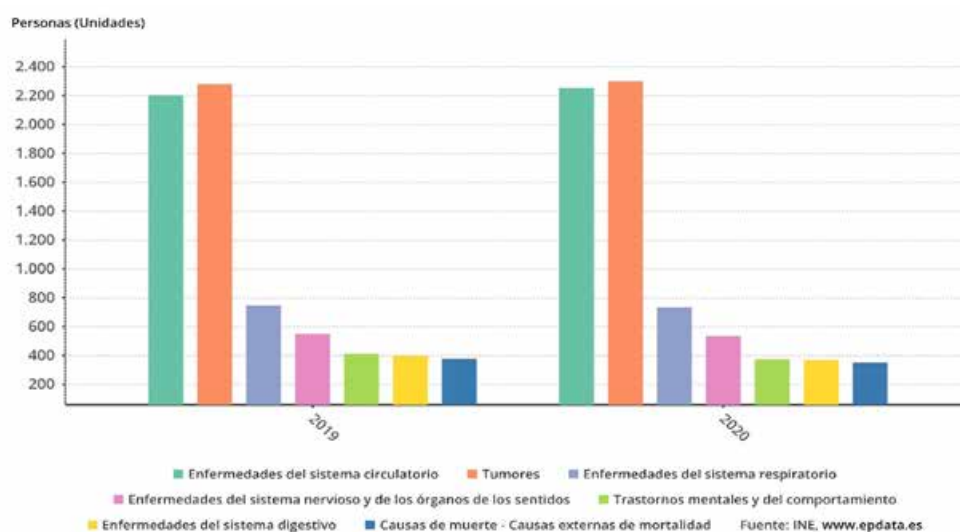
Cite as: Cortés J, López-González AA. Causes of death in the Balearic Islands: the fight against them. *Academic Journal of Health Sciences* 2023; 38 (6):79-83 doi: 10.3306/AJHS.2023.38.06.79

What is the mortality rate we suffer in the Balearic Islands? What are the main causes of this mortality? Do the rate and its causes match the reality of our environment? These are questions that need to be answered in order to be able to conveniently approach their possible solution, which must always be adjusted to the recommendations proposed by the best and most current scientific evidence.

In the Balearic Islands, we suffer from a crude standardized mortality rate of 221.6, in the middle Spanish area, which ranges from 275.6 in Andalusia to 157.7 in Madrid¹.

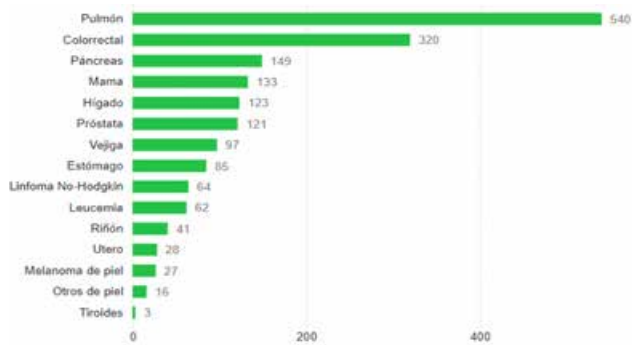
What are the causes of death for citizens of the Balearic Islands? The records report (**Figure 1**) that the vast majority of deaths in the Balearic Islands are due with almost the same frequency to cardiovascular diseases or tumours and that this is a similar situation for all the Spanish Autonomous Communities¹. As you can see, other pathologies or causes of death are statistically very far from these first two. Therefore, it will be a health priority to work against these two groups of diseases, cardiovascular diseases and tumours.

Figure 1: Main causes of mortality in Spain.



It will be very important to reliably know which cancers cause the most mortality in our home. A look at the cancer records will give us relevant and quality information about it². In the Balearic Islands, 925 women and 1,398 men died of cancer in 2022. The distribution by type of cancer causing this mortality can be consulted in **figure 2**. It is clear that the fight against lung and colon cancers, two preventable cancers, seems to be a priority.

Figure 2: Ranking of deaths by type of cancer.



An approach to the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) to obtain a healthy life is not a bad way to approach these attitudes and activities. The WHO recommends these twelve³:

1. Follow a healthy diet
2. Stay physically active
3. Get vaccinated
4. Do not consume tobacco in any form
5. Avoid or reduce alcohol consumption
6. Manage stress
7. Maintain good hygiene
8. Do not drive at excessive speed or under the influence of alcohol
9. Fasten your seat belt in the car and wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle or bicycle
10. Maintain safe sexual practices
11. Submit to regular medical check-ups
12. Breastfeed babies.

Let us now analyse the impact and the situation of these recommendations more related to health and their connotations to the most frequent causes of death in the Balearic Islands, that is to say diet, sedentary lifestyle, vaccination, smoking, alcoholism, sexual practices and undergo periodic reviews.

1/2. Follow a healthy diet. Stay physically active.

An inadequate diet and sedentary lifestyle are at the origin of obesity. Obesity has a direct relationship with serious cardio-circulatory problems and according to data from the Spanish Society of Cardiology⁴ is the most prevalent risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and is also directly related to two very common cancers, colorectal and breast. Obesity is present in our Community at high

levels 5, 15%, 11% in women, 19% in men, with a tendency to increase.

35.86% of men and 46.64% of women are sedentary in our home⁵. Being sedentary, in addition to causing serious damage to our cardiovascular system (high risk of ischemic heart disease), contributes to accentuating the effects of other risk factors such as hypertension.

A healthy diet⁶ is defined in a very consensual way, which can be summarized as follows:

- Importance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, milk and non-fat or low-fat dairy products.
- Include a variety of protein foods such as seafood, lean meats, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Low amount of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

Therefore, working to promote and facilitate physical exercise is an educational and health priority, but also and fundamentally a labor and social one. And also healthy food, with diets that follow the appropriate recommendations. Physical exercise adapted to age and condition and healthy eating cannot, must not be a privilege, must not punish the wallet or make them directly inaccessible. As a matter of priority, the number of 160,000 people in the Balearic Islands with obesity, 12% of women and 20% of men, must be reduced, a circumstance that the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has found with enough scientific evidence to relate it to up to eight types of tumours, a fact that represents an increasingly urgent health problem among the Spanish population⁷.

3. Get vaccinated

Two vaccines are strongly linked to cancer, the hepatitis B and human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccines.

Against hepatitis B: The hepatitis B vaccine offers 95-100% protection against hepatitis B. Prevention of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection prevents the development of complications such as disease chronic diseases and liver cancer. It was the first vaccine with a preventive indication against cancer. It is included in the calendar of the National Health System⁸.

Against HPV: HPV is responsible for all cervical cancers, 90% of anal cancers, 30% of oropharyngeal cancers and 40% of vulvar cancers⁸. Vaccination in front of you, for to girls and boys, it is also included in the calendar of the National Health System⁸.

There is no doubt about the high effectiveness, efficiency and safety of both vaccines⁹.

The coverage obtained in Spain in vaccination against hepatitis B can be considered very satisfactory - 97.9%

- and the one reported against HPV, 81.8%, could be improved¹⁰.

In addition, we now have a highly effective and safe treatment to treat the female genital presence of HPV and its initial lesions¹¹.

4. Do not consume tobacco in any form

22% of the population in Spain claim to smoke daily, 2% are occasional smokers, while 25% declare themselves ex-smokers. On the other hand, more than half declare themselves non-smokers, and this is more common in women over the age of 75. The number of people over the age of fifteen who claim to smoke daily amounts to around 8.6 million people in Spain, while the number of non-smokers rises to almost 20 million people. Among the people who claim to smoke daily, the age range where men predominate is between 35 and 44. In the case of women, this interval is between 45 and 54¹².

What is the causal tobacco pathology?¹³ Smoking is linked to 80-90% of all lung cancer cases. Smoking is also linked to cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, cervix, kidney and bladder, as well as acute myeloid leukemia. Cigarettes are not the only form of tobacco use associated with cancer. Smokeless tobacco is linked to cancer of the pharynx, esophagus, stomach and lung, and colorectal cancer. In addition to cancer, smoking causes lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema and exacerbates asthma symptoms in adults and children. Cigarette smoking is the most important risk factor for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Smoking also significantly increases the risk of heart disease, including stroke or heart attack, vascular disease, and aneurysm. It is also linked to many other major health disorders, including rheumatic disease, inflammation and impaired immune function.

As a result, we are dealing with a health problem of the highest level, increased by the tobacco-dependent pathology suffered by the passive smoker, who is that person who does not smoke but shares life, work and leisure with the smoker. A passive smoker exposed to tobacco smoke for one hour inhales an amount equivalent to 2-3 cigarettes. A passive smoker has a 20-30% increased risk of coronary heart disease and lung cancer. Children of smoking parents have a 20% higher risk of suffering from asthma, respiratory infections (30%), otitis (50%), frequent colds, persistent cough, etc.¹⁴.

In the work against smoking, some lines are consolidated in our Community:

- Help the smoker to quit. Hospitals and Health Centers have equipment that very effectively helps to eliminate this addiction¹⁵, within the Addictions and Drug Addictions of the Balearic Islands (PADIB)

plan. In addition, the Home Project¹⁶ and the Spanish Association against Cancer¹⁷ work and collaborate in this action.

- In addition to prohibiting smoking in workplaces and on the terraces of bars and restaurants, create more smoke-free spaces, for example on beaches¹⁸.

5. Avoid or reduce alcohol consumption

Excessive alcohol consumption has immediate effects that increase the risk of many harmful health consequences¹⁹:

- Injuries from motor vehicle crashes, falls, drowning and burns.
- Violence, such as homicides, suicides, sexual assault and domestic violence.
- Risky sexual behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or having sex with multiple partners. These behaviors can lead to unplanned pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV.
- Spontaneous abortions and fetal death or disorders of the fetal alcohol spectrum in pregnant women and babies.

Over time, excessive alcohol consumption can cause chronic diseases and other serious problems such as:

- High blood pressure, heart disease, cerebrovascular accidents, liver disease and digestive problems.
- Cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon and rectum.
- Learning and memory problems, such as dementia and poor school performance.
- Mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.
- Family problems, work-related problems and unemployment.
- Dependence on alcohol or alcoholism.

These are the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control, of the United States, which leads the fight against alcoholism¹⁹:

- Drinking too much alcohol is defined as consuming the following:
 - In women, 8 or more sips a week.
 - In men, 15 or more sips a week.

What is drinking in moderation? It is the consumption of 1 sip or less per day for women and 2 sips or less per day for men.

However, some people should not consume any amount of alcohol, such as the following:

- People under the age of 21.
- Women who are pregnant or who might be pregnant.
- People who are driving, planning to drive or

participating in other activities that require dexterity, coordination and alertness.

- People who have taken prescription or over-the-counter medications that can cause adverse reactions if mixed with alcohol.
- People who suffer from conditions that can worsen if alcohol is consumed.
- People who are recovering from alcoholism or who cannot control the amount they drink.

54.8% of the Balearic population has consumed alcohol once a month, according to the EDADES²⁰ survey. It is more than half and it may seem like a lot, but the statistic says that it is almost 10 points less than the national average, of 64.5%. Only in the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla is less consumed on average than in this community of ours. The Valencian Country tops the list with 73.3% of its population.

The trend of alcohol consumption in the Balearic Islands has fallen in the last decade in all its indicators, being the only autonomous region in which this happens²¹. Working together from education so that this trend is consolidated as a clear objective for the defense of individual and collective health.

6. Maintain safe sexual practices

The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases continues to increase. The data show that in the last five years (from 2016 to 2021) ailments such as HIV, chlamydia or gonorrhoea have grown by 84% in Spain, especially among men, which double the number of diagnoses among women²². The worst part is that in many cases, especially among women, they are asymptomatic but are not exempt from possible sequelae.

In the Balearic Islands, more than five cases of sexually transmitted diseases are diagnosed every day and this is most likely due mainly to the fact that people with open sexual relationships have stopped using condoms.

6. Undergo regular medical check-ups

The concept of medical examination has undergone, is undergoing a profound revision aimed at adapting it to the so-called Personalized or Precision Medicine, that is to say, that which does not apply indistinct procedures but those that are adapted to the individual circumstances of those consultation, which necessarily include your genetic background, your lifestyle and your personal circumstances²³. This decision, increasingly introduced in oncological therapeutic procedures, is making its way into the preventive protocols of some cancers.

Tengamos en cuenta y resaltemos que tres de cada diez mujeres españolas no se revisan con la debida frecuencia, y este 30% acumula la inmensa mayoría, el 80% aproximado, del cáncer ginecológico incidente²⁴. Este es un dato que subraya la enorme eficacia preventiva de la revisión, que en una reciente publicación²⁵ nuestro grupo centró en el cáncer de cérvix, con nuevos protocolos basados en las más recientes evidencias., que confirman que el cribado nunca debe ser oportunista, siempre poblacional.

Regular medical check-ups, yes, but not indiscriminate and not based on an exploratory routine that has been proven inefficient and ineffective.

Conflict of interest

None for this publication.

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