

Is cancer a byproduct of modernity?

If there's one claim that irritates me that various proponents of alternative medicine like to make, it's that cancer is a "modern" disease, that it was rare (or even didn't exist) before the rise of modern societies, particularly the industrial revolution. This viewpoint bubbled up when a commentary in *Nature Reviews Cancer* that [argued strongly that cancer was almost unknown](#) (or at least very rare) in the ancient world based on the lack of finding it in mummies in Egypt and South America. They also looked at ancient texts and literature from Egypt and Greece, and say that there's little sign that cancer was a common ailment. After all, cancer is [mainly a disease of the elderly](#), with three-quarters of cases being diagnosed in people over 60 and more than a third of cases diagnosed in people 75 or older. Life expectancy was much shorter in ancient times; so relatively [few people made it to cancer-prone ages](#). Most [probably didn't make it past age 40](#).

It turns out that the apparently low incidence of cancer in mummies, skeletons, and other ancient remains might be an illusion. For example, investigators from the United Kingdom reported on the case of 3,000 year old skeleton found in Sudan of a man who appeared to have had metastatic prostate cancer, which they [published in PLoS One](#) by Michaela Binder and colleagues. It was the oldest complete example of a skeleton of an ancient human with cancer.

Read full, original article: [Ancient cancer](#)