

Breast Cancer Ribbon: Pink

The pink ribbon, today so quickly identified as a symbol in the fight against breast cancer, was first introduced during the 1990s as part of the Susan G. Komen New York City Race for the Cure.¹

Breast cancer survivors often don the ribbon or iterations of it on t-shirts, hats, bumper stickers, and even tattoos. Healthcare professionals and those working for a cure and awareness also use the ribbon to encourage screening for the disease.

The second most common cancer after skin cancer, breast cancer is diagnosed in more than 290,000 people each year.² Thanks to early detection and better treatments, though, survival rates are improving.

Prostate Cancer Ribbon: Light Blue

About 14.7% of all new cancer diagnoses in the United States are for prostate cancer.³ However, this type of cancer is talked about far less than other cancers that occur less frequently. That's at least partially because men are less likely to want to discuss their prostate cancer diagnosis.

The light blue ribbon was designed to bring attention to this disease that can often be successfully treated and has a five-year survival rate of 98%.⁴

Lung Cancer Ribbon: Pearl or White

As the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, a lung cancer diagnosis can be especially frightening.⁵ A pearl or white ribbon then seems an appropriate sign of hope for those fighting the disease, supporting loved ones, and working to find a cure. Ribbons as well as other items, such as pearl jewelry or white clothing, are sometimes worn as a way to build awareness of lung cancer.

A goal of many people and organizations is to create an understanding that those with lung cancer are not to be blamed for their disease. While lung cancer is associated with smoking, that does not mean that those who smoked and now suffer should be forgotten. In addition, more than half of the people diagnosed with lung cancer are former smokers or people who have never smoked.⁶

Colon Cancer: Dark Blue

Colon cancer, often referred to as colorectal cancer, is the fourth most common cancer in the United States, and it is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths.⁷ When the disease is diagnosed in the early stages, it has a 90% survival rate; however, the prognosis becomes worse if the cancer isn't caught until it's spread to surrounding tissue and lymph nodes.

The dark blue ribbon that represents colon cancer awareness is often used in conjunction with efforts to encourage regular screening among those who have no symptoms but are over age 45. A colonoscopy is often recommended to identify polyps and remove them before they turn into cancer.

Pancreatic Cancer: Purple

While pancreatic cancer is uncommon, it ranks as the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.⁸ This is because it is often not diagnosed until the disease is fairly advanced.

Pancreatic cancer awareness, including wearing purple ribbons, consists of encouraging those at risk to be screened. If you have a close genetic relative with the disease or if you know you have certain genetic disorders, it's recommended that you get genetic testing for pancreatic cancer. Talk to your doctor about your risk and possible screenings.

Ovarian Cancer: Teal

Ovarian cancer is the eighth most common cancer among people with ovaries worldwide.⁹ You're most at risk if you're postmenopausal although genetic factors, fertility problems, and endometriosis also seem to increase the chances of developing ovarian cancer.

Because this cancer may not present with any symptoms in the early stages, the best way to ensure an early diagnosis is to get regular pelvic exams. Diagnosis can also be achieved through transvaginal ultrasound and blood tests.

The use of teal ribbons and special events each September bring awareness to the need for these regular check-ups and to support those who have been diagnosed.

Skin Cancer: Black

The most prevalent cancer in the United States, skin cancer affects an estimated 3.3 million people.¹⁰ A black ribbon represents awareness for all types of skin cancer, but some subtypes use their own colors.

There are three main types

Brain Cancer: Gray

There are two types of brain cancer: one originates in the brain and the other has spread to the brain from another part of the body. There is a wide variety of types of tumors that can develop in the brain. The type of tumor, location, and whether or not it originated in the brain determines how it is treated.

Gray ribbons are worn to show support for survivors and those who have brain cancer. Fundraisers and awareness events are often held in May

How Many Cancer Ribbon Colors Are There?

There are 57 common cancer ribbon colors. While some cancer ribbons are well-known, others are often only worn by a select group of supporters. However, there is a great need to draw attention to all types of cancers. Here is a directory of the different ribbon colors used to promote awareness for different diagnoses and the months traditionally set aside for those groups