

Report:

Health expectancies in the UK, 2002

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the latest figures on male and female health expectancy, at birth and at age 65, for the UK and its four constituent countries in 2002. While life expectancy provides an estimate of average expected life-span, health expectancy partitions total life expectancy into years free from health related problems and years lived in ill-health. The methods used to calculate health expectancies are reported in detail in the article 'Review of sources and methods to monitor healthy life expectancy' published in *Health Statistics Quarterly* 26.¹

ONS produces two measures of health expectancy: healthy life expectancy (HLE), defined as expected years of life in good or fairly good health; and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE), defined as expected years of life free from limiting long-standing illness or disability. To examine the changes over the past 21 years, comparative results are included for 1981 and trend data are illustrated in charts. Figures prior to 2001 are based on the previous method of calculation,¹ but the difference between the old and the revised estimates is small allowing for trends to be monitored.

Table 1 shows the 2002 figures for life expectancy, HLE and DFLE at birth and at age 65 by sex for the UK and each constituent country along with the corresponding 95 per cent confidence intervals.

HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY, 2002

In the UK in 2002, on average males could expect to live in good or fairly good health (HLE) for 67.1 years at birth and 12.0 years at age 65. For females, HLE at birth was 69.9 years and 14.0 years at age 65.

Of the four constituent countries in the UK, England had the highest HLE at birth and at age 65 for both sexes. At birth, English males had a significantly higher HLE than all of the other constituent countries, whereas at age 65 it was only significantly higher than Wales and Northern Ireland. For females, at both ages, HLE in England was only significantly higher than Northern Ireland.

HLE estimates for Scotland were the second highest in the UK. Scotland also had the lowest life expectancy of all the countries in the UK. As a consequence, it is estimated that residents of Scotland spend the least number of years in not good health compared to other UK countries.

For males, the lowest estimate of HLE was for Wales. HLE for males at birth in Wales was 65.1 years, 2.0 years lower than the estimate for the UK. At age 65, HLE was 10.7 years; 1.3 years lower than the UK.

The pattern for females was different with the lowest HLE estimate being for Northern Ireland. Females at birth could expect to live 67.7 years in good or fairly good health, 2.2 years lower than the UK estimate. At age 65, HLE was 12.9 years; 1.1 years lower than the UK.

DISABILITY-FREE LIFE EXPECTANCY, 2002

In the UK in 2002, on average males at birth could expect to live 60.9 years free from limiting long-standing illness or a disability (DFLE), and 9.1 years at age 65. For females the equivalent DFLE figures were 63.0 years at birth, and 10.3 years at age 65.

The variation between countries of the UK in DFLE was similar to the variation in HLE. England had significantly higher estimates of DFLE than Wales and Northern Ireland for each of the four age by sex comparisons presented. For males at birth DFLE in England was also significantly higher than in Scotland.

DFLE estimates for Scotland were the second highest in the UK for all age/sex combinations. As Scotland had the lowest life expectancy for both sexes, residents of Scotland could expect to live the least number of years with a disability compared to other UK countries.

For males, Wales had the lowest DFLE of all the constituent countries: 57.7 years at birth and 7.1 years at age 65. Northern Ireland had the lowest DFLE estimates for females: 60.0 years at birth and 8.4 years at age 65.

Table 1 Life expectancy (LE), healthy life expectancy (HLE) and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE), at birth and age 65: by country and sex, 2002

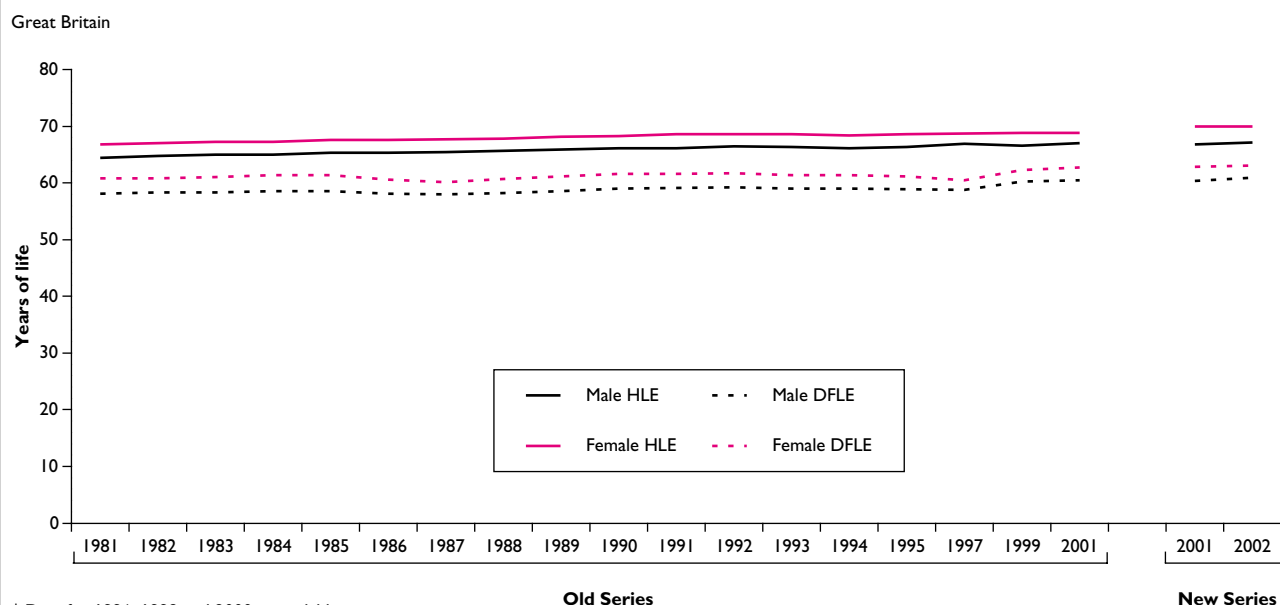
	Country	Life expectancy	Healthy life expectancy		Disability-free life expectancy	
		Years	Years	95% Confidence Interval	Years	95% Confidence Interval
At birth						
Males	United Kingdom	75.9	67.1	(66.9–67.4)	60.9	(60.6–61.2)
	Great Britain	76.0	67.2	(66.9–67.4)	60.9	(60.6–61.2)
	England	76.2	67.5	(67.2–67.8)	61.3	(60.9–61.6)
	Wales	75.7	65.1*	(63.9–66.4)	57.7*	(56.3–59.2)
	Scotland	73.5	65.5*	(64.6–66.4)	59.9*	(58.8–60.9)
	Northern Ireland	75.6	65.4*	(64.8–66.0)	58.4*	(57.7–59.2)
Females	United Kingdom	80.5	69.9	(69.6–70.1)	63.0	(62.7–63.3)
	Great Britain	80.5	69.9	(69.6–70.2)	63.0	(62.7–63.4)
	England	80.7	70.0	(69.7–70.4)	63.2	(62.8–63.6)
	Wales	80.2	68.9	(67.7–70.2)	60.6*	(59.1–62.0)
	Scotland	78.9	69.4	(68.5–70.3)	63.1	(62.0–64.2)
	Northern Ireland	80.4	67.7*	(67.1–68.3)	60.0*	(59.3–60.8)
At age 65						
Males	United Kingdom	16.1	12.0	(11.8–12.2)	9.1	(8.8–9.3)
	Great Britain	16.1	12.0	(11.8–12.2)	9.1	(8.8–9.3)
	England	16.3	12.1	(11.9–12.4)	9.3	(9.0–9.5)
	Wales	15.9	10.7*	(9.7–11.6)	7.1*	(6.1–8.0)
	Scotland	15.1	11.5	(10.9–12.2)	8.7	(8.0–9.5)
	Northern Ireland	15.9	11.4*	(11.0–11.8)	7.7*	(7.1–8.2)
Females	United Kingdom	19.1	14.0	(13.9–14.2)	10.3	(10.1–10.5)
	Great Britain	19.1	14.1	(13.9–14.3)	10.3	(10.1–10.5)
	England	19.2	14.1	(13.9–14.4)	10.4	(10.2–10.7)
	Wales	18.8	13.1	(12.2–14.0)	8.6*	(7.7–9.6)
	Scotland	18.1	13.9	(13.3–14.6)	10.4	(9.7–11.2)
	Northern Ireland	18.9	12.9*	(12.5–13.3)	8.4*	(7.9–8.9)

Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department

* Significantly different from England at the 95 per cent level.

Figure 1

Healthy life expectancy (HLE) and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE) at birth: by sex, 1981–2002*



* Data for 1996, 1998 and 2000 unavailable.

Source: Office for National Statistics, Government Actuary's Department

TRENDS IN HEALTH EXPECTANCIES 1981–2002, GREAT BRITAIN

At birth

Between 1981 and 2002, life expectancy at birth for males in Great Britain increased 5.1 years (from 70.9 to 76.0 years). This improvement in life expectancy was split into an increase of 2.8 years in both DFLE and HLE and a 2.4 years increase in years lived in 'not good' health or with a disability respectively (see Figure 1 and Table 2). Overall, for males at birth the proportion of total life spent in good health fell by 2.5 percentage points (from 90.9 to 88.4 per cent). The equivalent fall in disability-free life expectancy was 1.9 percentage points (from 82.0 to 80.1 per cent).

Over the same period, life expectancy at birth for females increased by 3.7 years (from 76.8 to 80.5 years) while HLE increased by 3.2 years and DFLE increased by 2.2 years. As a result, the number of years spent in 'not good' health has increased by just 0.5 years between 1981 and 2002 while the number of expected years lived with a disability has increased

by 1.5 years. The proportion of life spent in good health has remained constant between 1981 and 2002, at 86.9 per cent, while the proportion spent without a disability has increased by one percentage point (from 79.1 to 80.1 per cent).

Therefore for men all the gains in life expectancy were not gains in healthy years: just over half the added years of life expectancy at birth were in healthy years (either free from disability or in 'good' or 'fairly good' health). In contrast, for women over 80 per cent of the gain in life was in good health (HLE) and just 60 per cent was free from a disability (DFLE).

At age 65

Between 1981 and 2002, life expectancy at age 65 for males increased by 3.1 years (from 13.0 years to 16.1 years). Over the same period, HLE increased by 2.1 years and years spent in not good health increased by 1.0 year; DFLE increased by 1.5 years and the number of years spent with a disability increased by 1.6 years (see Figure 2 and Table 3). For men at age 65, the proportion of life spent in either good health or

Table 2

Life expectancy and health expectancies at birth: by sex, 1981 and 2002

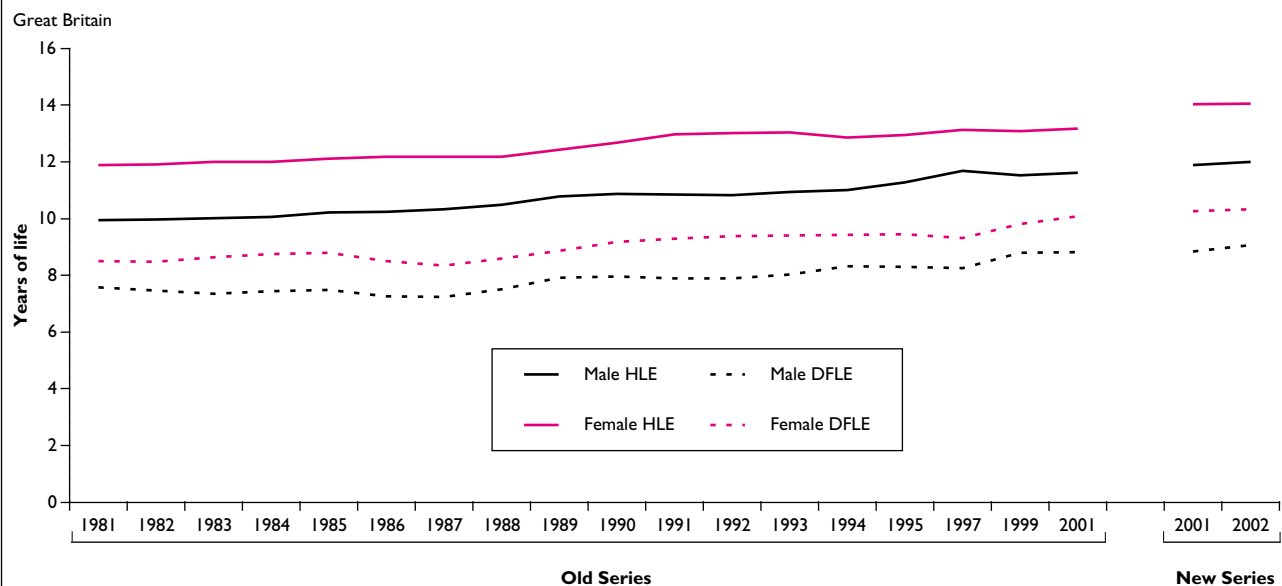
GREAT BRITAIN

	Males			Females		
	1981	2002	Absolute change (2002–1981)	1981	2002	Absolute change (2002–1981)
Life Expectancy (years)	70.9	76.0	5.1	76.8	80.5	3.7
Healthy Life Expectancy (years)	64.4	67.2	2.8	66.7	69.9	3.2
ill-health (years)	6.4	8.8	2.4	10.1	10.6	0.5
% of life healthy	90.9	88.4	-2.5	86.9	86.8	-0.0
Disability-free Life Expectancy (years)	58.1	60.9	2.8	60.8	63.0	2.2
limited (years)	12.8	15.1	2.4	16.0	17.5	1.5
% of life without disability	82.0	80.1	-1.9	79.1	78.3	-0.9

Source: Office for National Statistics, Government Actuary's Department

Figure 2

Healthy life expectancy (HLE) and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE) at age 65: by sex, 1981–2002*



* Data for 1996, 1998 and 2000 unavailable.

Source: Office for National Statistics, Government Actuary's Department

Table 3 Life expectancy and health expectancies at age 65: by sex, 1981 and 2002

Great Britain

	Males			Females		
	1981	2002	Absolute change (2002–1981)	1981	2002	Absolute change (2002–1981)
Life Expectancy (years)	13.0	16.1	3.1	16.9	19.1	2.2
Healthy Life Expectancy (years)	9.9	12.0	2.1	11.9	14.1	2.2
ill-health (years)	3.1	4.1	1.0	5.0	5.0	0.0
% of life healthy	76.2	74.5	-1.6	70.4	73.8	3.4
Disability-free Life Expectancy (years)	7.6	9.1	1.5	8.5	10.3	1.8
limited (years)	5.4	7.0	1.6	8.4	8.8	0.4
% of life without disability	58.5	56.5	-1.9	50.3	53.9	3.6

Source: Office for National Statistics, Government Actuary's Department

without a disability decreased by just under 2 percentage points between 1981 and 2002.

The changes over the last two decades for women at age 65 were markedly different. The increase in life expectancy at age 65 for women in Great Britain was smaller (2.2 years) than for men between 1981 and 2002. Over the same period, HLE increased by 2.2 years and DFLE increased by 1.8 years. Hence, most of the gains in life expectancy were gains in good health or without a disability. As a result in the proportion of life spent in good health or without a disability increased between 1981 and 2002 by about 3.5 percentage points for women at age 65.

WEBSITE REPORT AND RESULTS

The results in this report can also be found on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=12964&Pos=&ColRank=2&Rank=1000

Figures on the National Statistics website include estimates of HLE and DFLE for the UK, Great Britain, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2001 and 2002. Trend data is also available for Great Britain and England for each year between 1981 and 2002. All estimates are presented along with the corresponding life expectancy figures and 95 per cent confidence intervals.^{2,3}

REFERENCES

1. Breakwell C and Bajekal M (2005) Review of sources and methods to monitor Healthy Life Expectancy. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 26, 17–22. Available on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=6725&Pos=6&ColRank=2&Rank=208
2. All life expectancy figures are available to download from the Government Actuary's Department website at: www.gad.gov.uk
3. Jagger C (1999) *Health Expectancy Calculation by the Sullivan Method: A Practical Guide*. NUPRI Research Paper Series No 68.