

Is the incidence of ALS increasing? No.

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Only few epidemiological studies analyzed the temporal trends of ALS incidence. A study from Norway showed that ALS mortality increased substantially among the elderly over the past decades. In contrast, national US mortality data showed only a small overall increase in the death rate between 1979 and 1983, with a subsequent plateau. Previous reviews identified lower incidence in retrospective studies. However, those reviews considered not only population-based studies with multi-source cases ascertainment but also clinic-based data. The temporal trends in the incidence of ALS in a well-defined population was assessed for the first time in a prospective study done in Rochester, Minnesota, USA. That study showed the incidence of ALS to be constant at a rate of 1.7 per 100 000 person-years between 1925 and 1998. Increasing ALS incidence over time has been reported by clinic-based studies, but these findings are almost certainly due to improvements in case ascertainment and diagnostic methods rather than a genuine increase in incidence. Data from a systematic review of worldwide incidence studies show that, with time, there was an increase in crude incidence but not in standardized incidence. This pattern could be explained, at least partially, by the evolution of the age structure of the populations at risk, especially in countries with the highest life expectancy in the past 50 years.