



From Dr A Majid Katme

Birthdays are deadly: Why over-60s are 14% more likely to die on that day

- **Higher rates of fatal heart attacks, strokes and suicides on the special day**
- **Danger of birthday blues uncovered by researchers who examined more than two million deaths**

Past a certain age, blowing out the birthday candles can bring more dread than cheer.

But the passing of another year may be the least of our problems, according to scientists who found we are statistically more likely to die on our birthday than any other day.

From a study of more than two million people, researchers say the 'birthday blues' bring a rise in deaths from heart attacks, strokes, falls, suicides and even cancer.

On average, people over the age of 60 were 14 per cent more likely to die on their birthdays.



Not all sweet: Stress on people's birthdays have been linked by scientists to a spike in death rates among those celebrating their special day

The findings – from a study over a 40-year period in Switzerland – back up the idea that 'birthday stress' has a major effect on our lifespan.

Most of the rise was accounted for by heart attacks, which rose 18.6 per cent on birthdays and were significantly higher for men and women.

Levels of strokes were up 21.5 per cent – mostly in women – and there was a surprisingly large increase in cancer deaths in both sexes of 10.5 per cent.

Dr Vladeta Ajdacic-Gross, a senior researcher in psychiatry at the University of Zurich, said: 'Birthdays end lethally more frequently than might be expected.'



William Shakespeare is reported to have died on his 52nd birthday in 1616 of unknown causes

He added that elderly people may feel particularly exposed to stress on birthdays.

The risk of birthday death rose as people got older.

This is backed up by other data on hospital admission taken in Canada showing that strokes were more likely to occur on birthdays than other days, especially among patients with a history of high blood pressure.

There was no significant increase in birthday deaths for the under-60s in the official mortality records from between 1969 and 2008.

A significant rise in suicides and accidental deaths for the over-60s on birthdays was found only in men.

There was a 34.9 per cent rise in suicides, 28.5 per cent rise in accidental deaths not related to cars, and a 44 per cent rise in deaths from falls on birthdays, with the risk increasing for about four days before the big day.

It was previously thought that people would be more likely to die in the days after their birthday as the thought of reaching the milestone would help them cling on for longer.

But the researchers said this theory was disproved by their findings, and they support the 'anniversary reaction' theory – also known as the birthday blues.

Dr Lewis Halsey, a senior lecturer in environmental physiology at the University of Roehampton, said: 'One interesting finding is that more suicides happen on birthdays, though only in men.'

'The authors suggest that this increase could be related to them drinking more alcohol on birthdays.

'But perhaps men are more likely to make a statement about their unhappiness when they think people will be taking more notice of them.

'Or perhaps women feel that it is unfair on others who might be celebrating with them to put them through dealing with suicide.'

Ingrid Bergman died of breast cancer on her 67th birthday in 1982.

William Shakespeare is also reported to have died on his 52nd birthday in 1616 of unknown causes.

The study is published in the journal Annals of Epidemiology.