28.1% of Outpatients Had No Symptoms When First Seen by a Physician, and Among Cancers This Ranges from 65.3% for Prostate and 64.4% for Lung to 31.6% for Uterus — for Time to First Visit, Those with Symptoms Have Both Ends (Under 24 Hours and 3 Months or More) About as Thick as the Middle (Ends ÷ Middle 0.958), While Those Without Symptoms Gather in the Middle, 1 Week to Under 3 Months (0.350) [M088]

Shape of the time to first visit = ends ÷ middle ── What separates them is whether there were symptoms or not

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Abstract

Using basic tabulation Tables 16 and 18 and related tabulation Tables 16 and 18 of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's Patient's Behavior Survey (2023), this paper looked at whether outpatients of general hospitals had symptoms when first seen by a physician, and at the shape of the distribution of time to that first visit. No new mathematical theorem and no new law are claimed.

First, the tables are consistent. In every row the categories sum to 100 within a rounding difference of 0.2. Because the table headings do not say what the "time to first visit" is counted from (especially for people without symptoms), this paper does not interpret its starting point and compares only the shape of the distribution (Section 3).

Second, **28.1% had no symptoms when first seen by a physician, ranging across the 14 disease chapters shown from 47.4% for neoplasms to 6.5% for musculoskeletal diseases (7.29-fold).**

Among the 7 cancer sites, 3 exceed half — prostate 65.3%, trachea, bronchus and lung 64.4%, and liver and intrahepatic bile ducts 61.0% — and uterus is 31.6% (Section 4).

Third, this is the core of the paper. **For time to first visit, people with symptoms are more often both under 24 hours (13.8%) and at 3 months or more (13.5%) than people without symptoms (5.6% and 8.0%), and the two ends together, 27.3%, are about as thick as the middle (1 week to under 3 months), 28.5% (ends ÷ middle 0.958). For people without symptoms, 1 week to under 1 month (25.4%) is the largest band, and ends ÷ middle is 0.350** (Section 5).

Fourth, **ends ÷ middle is larger for people with symptoms in all 5 age groups, and in 13 of the 14 chapters; the only exception is ear diseases** (Sections 5 and 6).

Fifth, what makes up the ends differs by chapter. **Among people with symptoms, under 24 hours is 49.5% for injury and poisoning, 22.3% for circulatory, and 17.8% for respiratory diseases, while 3 months or more is common for nervous system (21.5%) and musculoskeletal (18.7%) diseases** (Section 6).

Sixth, what separates them is **whether there were symptoms or not**. Under the same "time to first visit," the distribution for people with symptoms spreads to both the short and the long side, and the distribution for people without symptoms gathers in the middle. A single average cannot show this difference in shape.

Scope note: **This paper claims no new mathematical theorem and no new law** — symptoms and time to first visit are in public tables, and this paper only compared the ends and the middle of their distribution. **This paper is a structural interpretation of the shape of numbers in public aggregate data; it is not medical advice, not a diagnosis, and not a treatment recommendation. The author is not a physician. Decisions about individual health should be discussed with a physician or a medical institution. This is a preprint that has not been peer reviewed. It does not address how soon one should see a doctor, whether seeing a doctor early or late is good or bad, or how screening or the discovery of cancer is good or bad.** Time to first visit is the band patients wrote on the questionnaire, and what it is counted from (especially for people without symptoms) cannot be told from the tables, so this paper does not interpret the starting point. Why the share without symptoms differs by disease or cancer site cannot be separated with these tables either. Coverage is outpatients of general hospitals who came "to receive consultation, treatment, tests, etc." (table notes). The related tabulation covers only people who could be linked to other surveys. Certain infectious and parasitic diseases and mental and behavioural disorders (fields this series holds back), codes for special purposes, the chapters for pregnancy, the perinatal period, and congenital malformations, and the chapter for factors influencing health status are not shown chapter by chapter. **About the data**: the Patient's Behavior Survey (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) was taken from e-Stat and used under the Government of Japan Standard Terms of Use (Version 2.0); the ratios in this paper were processed from it. What this paper adds: **splitting the distribution of time to first visit into its ends and middle and showing, by age group and by disease chapter, that for people with symptoms the ends are about as thick as the middle while for people without symptoms it gathers in the middle, and showing that the share without symptoms differs 2.07-fold across cancer sites.**

1. Notation and question

- **Share without symptoms**: the share of outpatients who answered that they had "no symptoms" when first seen by a physician.
- **Ends**: the sum of the shares for time to first visit "under 24 hours" and "3 months or more."
- **Middle**: the sum of the shares for "1 week to under 1 month" and "1 month to under 3 months."
- **Ends ÷ middle**: how far the distribution spreads to the short and the long side. It is the same whether or not "don't remember" and unknown are excluded.

Question: How many had no symptoms when first seen by a physician, and how does this differ by disease? Does the shape of the distribution of time to first visit differ by whether there were symptoms?

Observation 1.1: M085 used the cross tables of the same Patient's Behavior Survey to look at outpatient waiting and consultation times. This paper looks at the same survey from the side of the time up to the first visit to a physician.

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2. Preview and design

Written honestly: the design was decided after looking at the tables.

	Content
Tables	Patient's Behavior Survey 2023, basic tabulation Table 16 (symptoms × hospital type, sex, age group) and Table 18 (symptoms × age group × place of first visit × time to first visit), and related tabulation Tables 16 and 18 (by disease)
Noticed in the preview	The distribution of time to first visit was thick at both under 24 hours and 3 months or more for people with symptoms, and gathered in the middle for people without symptoms. Instead of the average, the shape was compared by the ratio of ends to middle
Noticed in the preview (2)	To confirm the starting point of "time to first visit," I took the PDF of the 2023 outpatient questionnaire from the ministry's page, but its embedded text was broken and could not be read by machine, so it was not used. This paper does not interpret the starting point
Noticed in the preview (3)	I first set the share without symptoms as lowest at ages 0–14, and it failed (the lowest is 15–39)
Comparison	Share without symptoms (age, chapter, cancer site), and ends ÷ middle for time to first visit (total, age, chapter)

3. Data and checks

Calculation 3.1 The 4 retrieved files were fixed by SHA-256, and the following were checked.

- The 4 tables are for 2023, in %. Note to Table 16: people who came "to receive consultation, treatment, tests, etc." Note to Table 18: among them, those who "had symptoms" and those who "had no symptoms."
- The columns of Table 18 are 9 columns of time to first visit (total, under 24 hours, 1–3 days, 4–6 days, 1 week to under 1 month, 1 month to under 3 months, 3 months or more, don't remember, unknown) under each place of first visit, starting with the total.
- In every row, categories minus 100 are at most 0.1 in Table 16 and 0.2 in Table 18 (rounding).
- The related tabulation has rows for the 14 chapters shown and the 7 cancer sites (restated).

4. Share without symptoms

Calculation 4.1 Share with no symptoms when first seen by a physician (%)

	No symptoms	Had symptoms
All	28.1	66.3
Ages 0–14	20.7	73.2
Ages 15–39	20.3	73.6
Ages 40–64	30.5	65.6
Ages 65–74	32.8	62.7
Ages 75+	26.7	66.5

Observation 4.2: **The share without symptoms is highest at ages 65–74 (32.8%) and lowest at 15–39 (20.3%).** It first failed because I set ages 0–14 as the lowest (0–14 is 20.7%).

Calculation 4.3 Disease chapters and cancer sites (related tabulation Table 16, %)

Chapter or site	No symptoms	Had symptoms
Neoplasms	47.4	49.8
Endocrine and metabolic	45.3	48.2
Circulatory	30.6	62.6
Eye	22.5	72.8
Respiratory	16.1	79.6
Injury and poisoning	6.8	89.0
Musculoskeletal	6.5	90.8
Cancer (prostate)	65.3	31.6
Cancer (trachea, bronchus and lung)	64.4	33.6
Cancer (liver and intrahepatic bile ducts)	61.0	34.1
Cancer (colon and rectum)	47.0	51.7
Cancer (stomach)	43.6	52.0
Cancer (breast)	42.8	55.7
Cancer (uterus)	31.6	67.1

Observation 4.4: **Among the 14 chapters shown, the share without symptoms is highest for neoplasms (47.4%) and lowest for musculoskeletal diseases (6.5%) (7.29-fold). Among the 7 cancer sites, 3 exceed half — prostate (65.3%), trachea, bronchus and lung (64.4%), and liver and intrahepatic bile ducts (61.0%) — and uterus (31.6%) is lowest.** What the differences come from cannot be separated with these tables.

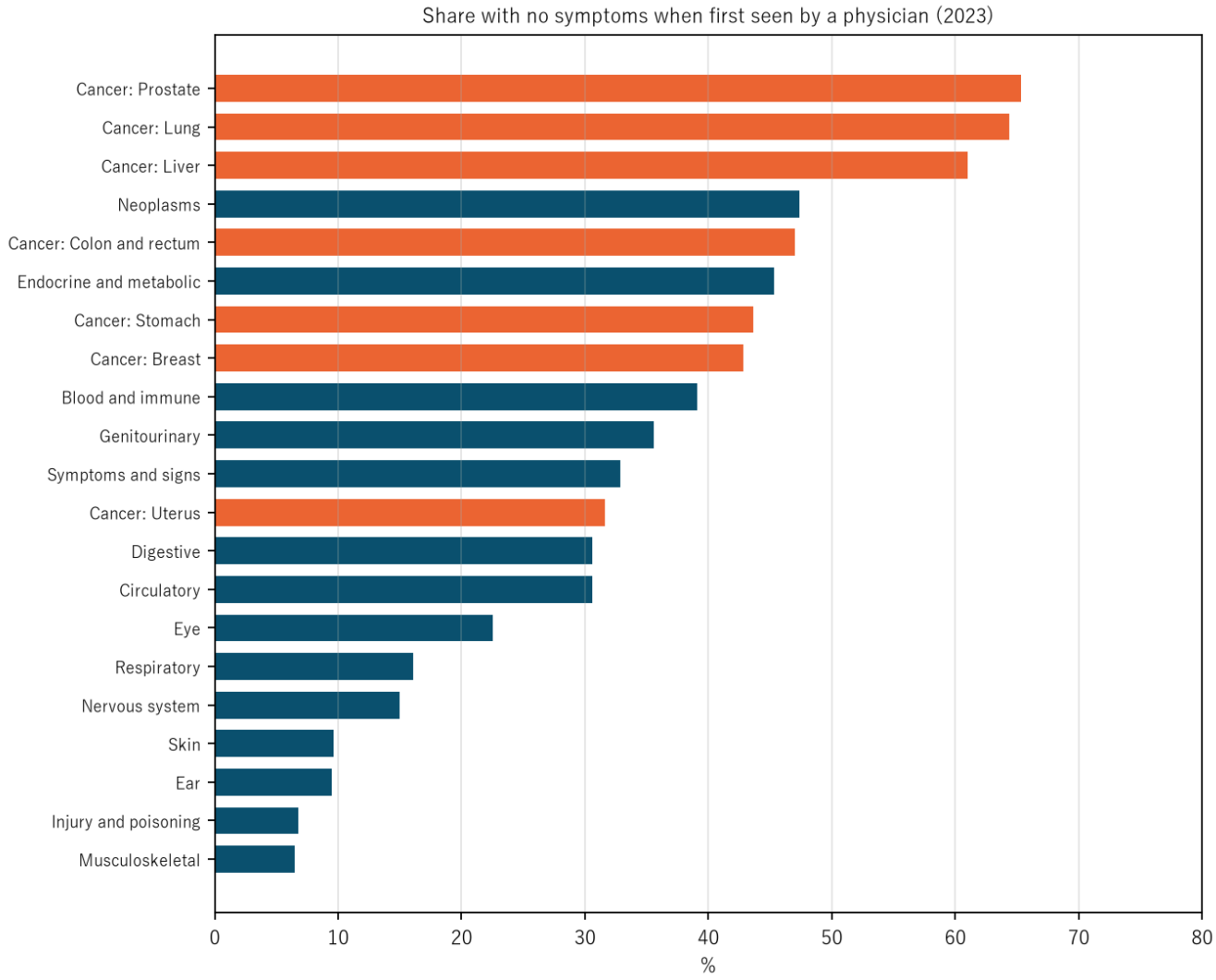


Figure 2: Share with no symptoms when first seen by a physician (2023). Navy is disease chapters and orange is cancer sites.

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5. The core — the shape of the distribution of time to first visit

Calculation 5.1 Time to first visit (basic tabulation Table 18, all, %)

Time	Had symptoms	No symptoms
Under 24 hours	13.8	5.6
1–3 days	17.7	8.7
4–6 days	8.8	7.5
1 week to under 1 month	17.5	25.4
1 month to under 3 months	11.0	13.5
3 months or more	13.5	8.0
Don't remember	12.5	18.8
Unknown	5.1	12.6
Ends ÷ middle	0.958	0.350

Observation 5.2: **People with symptoms are more often both under 24 hours (13.8%) and at 3 months or more (13.5%) than people without symptoms (5.6% and 8.0%). The two ends, 27.3%, are about as thick as the middle, 28.5%, and ends ÷ middle is 0.958. For people without symptoms, 1 week to under 1 month is the largest band; the ends are 13.6% against a middle of 38.9%, and ends ÷ middle is 0.350 (1/2.740 of those with symptoms).** With "don't remember" and unknown excluded, ends ÷ middle stays at 0.958 and 0.350. "Don't remember" and unknown are more common among people without symptoms (18.8% and 12.6%).

Calculation 5.3 Ends ÷ middle by age group

Age	Had symptoms	No symptoms
0–14	2.064	0.676
15–39	0.903	0.363
40–64	0.918	0.333
65–74	0.889	0.309
75+	0.931	0.371

Observation 5.4: **In all 5 age groups, ends ÷ middle is larger for people with symptoms.** At ages 0–14, 29.1% of people with symptoms were under 24 hours, and ends ÷ middle is 2.064, larger than in the other 4 age groups (0.889–0.931).

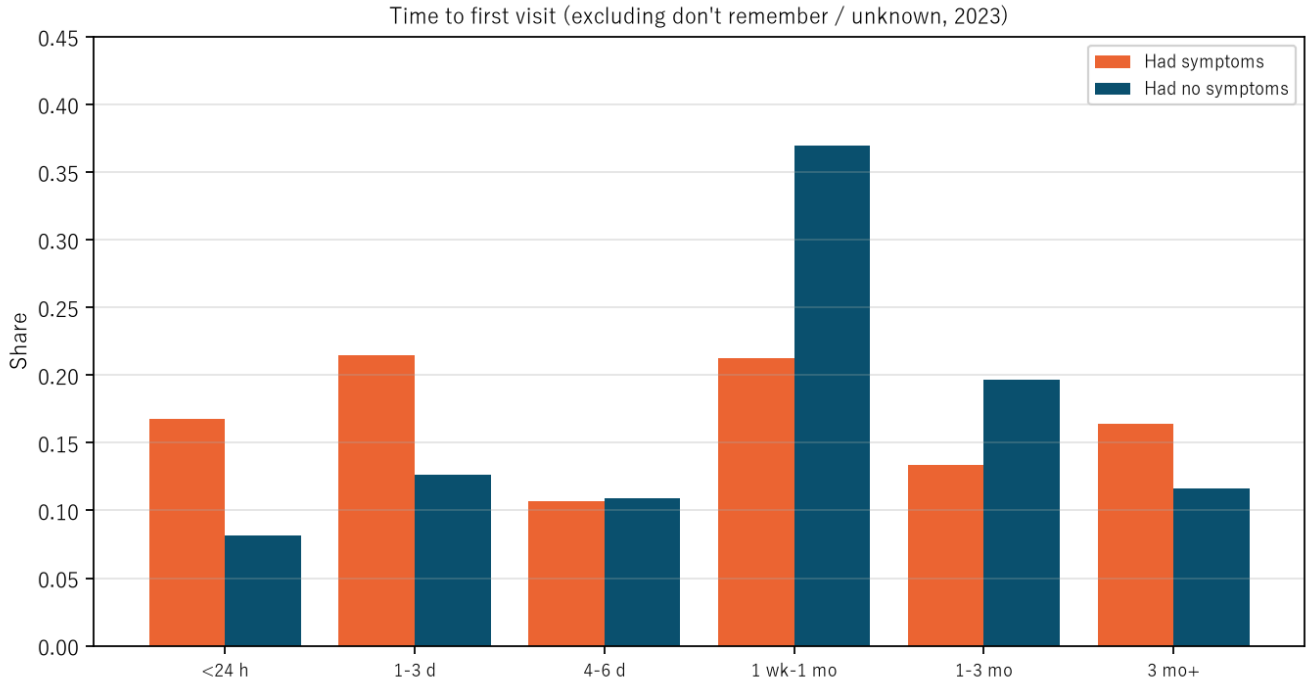


Figure 1: Time to first visit (share excluding don't remember / unknown, 2023). Orange is people with symptoms and navy people without.

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6. By chapter

Calculation 6.1 Related tabulation Table 18, ends ÷ middle (chapters)

Chapter	With symptoms: ends ÷ middle	With symptoms: under 24 h	With symptoms: 3 months+	Without symptoms: ends ÷ middle
Injury and poisoning	4.309	49.5	3.5	1.566
Nervous system	1.438	13.3	21.5	0.634
Circulatory	1.344	22.3	7.8	0.436
Respiratory	1.302	17.8	8.5	0.377
Ear	1.074	12.3	15.3	2.093
Digestive	0.801	11.2	14.5	0.278
Musculoskeletal	0.775	6.8	18.7	0.361
Neoplasms	0.690	8.3	18.0	0.244
Skin	0.620	6.6	14.0	0.441

Observation 6.2: **In 13 of the 14 chapters, ends ÷ middle is larger for people with symptoms; the only exception is ear diseases** (for ear diseases, 25.2% of people without symptoms were at 3 months or more). The table shows 9 of the 14 chapters. What makes up the ends differs by chapter: among people with symptoms, under 24 hours is 49.5% for injury and poisoning, nearly half, followed by circulatory (22.3%) and respiratory (17.8%). Three months or more is common for nervous system (21.5%) and musculoskeletal (18.7%). Ends ÷ middle for the total of the related tabulation is 0.990 and 0.353, close to the basic tabulation (0.958 and 0.350), which covers different respondents.

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7. Limitations

1. **What "time to first visit" is counted from cannot be told from the tables.** This paper did not interpret the starting point and compared only the shape of the distribution. The starting point is not necessarily the same for people with and without symptoms.

2. Time to first visit and symptoms are the answers patients wrote on the questionnaire, with 5.1–18.8% "don't remember" or unknown.
3. Why the share without symptoms differs by cancer site or disease cannot be separated with these tables.
4. Coverage is outpatients of general hospitals; clinics are not included. The related tabulation covers only people who could be linked.
5. The paper does not address how soon one should see a doctor or whether seeing a doctor early or late is good or bad.

Conclusion

28.1% of outpatients had no symptoms when first seen by a physician, and across cancer sites this ranged from 65.3% for prostate and 64.4% for lung to 31.6% for uterus. For time to first visit, people with symptoms had both ends — under 24 hours and 3 months or more — about as thick as the middle (0.958), while people without symptoms gathered in the middle (0.350). The direction was the same in all 5 age groups and in 13 of the 14 chapters.

What separates them is one thing — whether there were symptoms or not.

When you hear "how long it took to see a doctor," **check together whether it is about one average or about a distribution spread to both the short and the long side.**

Data and reproduction

Data	Patient's Behavior Survey 2023, basic tabulation Tables 16 and 18, related tabulation Tables 16 and 18 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, e-Stat) (retrieved 26 September 2026)
Terms of use	e-Stat follows the Government of Japan Standard Terms of Use (Version 2.0). The ratios in this paper were processed from it and are not numbers produced by the government
Coverage	Japan, outpatients of general hospitals (who came to receive consultation, treatment, tests, etc.), 2023
Verification	`検算/M088.py` (`--zu` also draws the figures). Every number in the text is taken from `検算/M088_output.txt`
Raw data	`data/` holds the retrieved files and `SOURCES.md` (URLs, retrieval date, SHA-256, terms of use, definitions and how the calculations were set up)
Figures	`図/M088_zu1`, `図/M088_zu2` (png, svg, English versions)

References

- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Patient's Behavior Survey 2023, basic tabulation Tables 16 and 18, related tabulation Tables 16 and 18 (in Japanese). e-Stat (accessed 26 September 2026). https://www.e-stat.go.jp/
- Yamagishi, Y. (2026). "A 3-Hour Wait for a 3-Minute Consultation" Was 0.3% of Outpatients in 2014, Indistinguishable Within Rounding from 0.3097%, the Product of Waiting 3 Hours or More (1.9%) and a Consultation Under 3 Minutes (16.3%) — Between Hospital Types the Direction Is Reversed: In 2023, the Higher a Type's Share Waiting 1 Hour or More, the Lower Its Share of Consultations Under 5 Minutes, and the Two Rankings Are Exactly Opposite Across the 5 Types [M085]. Zenodo (unpublished).