



What is cancer?

Cancer affects 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women in the United States. Chances are that you or someone you know has been affected by cancer.

Cancer starts when there are changes in parts of a person's cells (genes). If these changes lead to cancer, the cells can grow out of control and crowd out normal cells. Cancer cells can also spread from where they start to other parts of the body.

Where can cancer start?

Cancer can start in any part of the body. This includes organs, muscles, bones, and blood. Cancer is named for the part of the body or type of cell where it begins. For example, cancer that starts in the breast is called breast cancer. Even if it spreads to other parts of the body, it is still called breast cancer.

When cancer spreads and grows

Cancer cells can sometimes spread to other parts of the body (metastasis). They can end up in the lymph nodes or other body organs, causing problems with how the body works.

Some types of cancer grow fast. Others grow more slowly. Some are more likely to spread to other parts of the body. Others tend to stay where they started.

What is a tumor?

A tumor is a mass or lump made up of many cells. Some tumors are cancer (malignant), but many tumors are not cancer (benign).

Some cancers are caused by changes in blood cells and don't cause tumors. These are cancers such as leukemia, myeloma, and lymphoma.

What causes cancer?

There are many risk factors for cancer. Your risk for cancer might be raised by:

- Some lifestyle habits
- Gene changes that you get from your parents (inherited)
- Being exposed at work, home, or outside to things that can cause cancer

Glossary

Here are some words you might hear from your cancer care team.

Benign: Tumors that are not cancer

Biomarkers: Parts of some cancer cells that might be used to choose the best treatment, check to see whether treatment is working, and watch to see if a cancer has come back. They are also called tumor markers.

Cancer stage: The size of a cancer and if it has spread from where it started

Cancer treatment plan: Outline of the treatments you will get, when you will get them, and how long treatment is likely to last

Genes: Parts of cells that tell them when to grow, divide, and act. You get your genes from your parents.

Lymph nodes: Small structures that filter the fluid in the body. They trap things like cancer cells and infections. Immune cells in the lymph nodes help the body fight infections and cancer.

Malignant: Tumors that are cancer

Metastasis: When cancer spreads from one part of the body to another

Risk factor: Something that raises the chance of getting cancer

Screening tests: Tests done to look for cancer before a person has any symptoms

These things can cause changes in genes that might lead to cancer. But many times, there is no known cause for a cancer.

You can't change the genes you get from your parents, but you might lower your risk of cancer by:

- Staying away from tobacco and secondhand smoke
- Eating healthy foods
- Being active
- Staying at a healthy weight
- Limiting how much alcohol you drink
- Protecting your skin from the sun

How is cancer found?

Some cancers are found when a person has symptoms that don't go away. Other cancers are found when a person gets regular screening tests. Screening tests can help find certain cancers before a person has symptoms, or when cancers are smaller and may be easier to treat.

What does cancer stage mean?

Once a cancer is found, the cancer care team will want to find out the stage of the cancer and any other factors that can be used to decide the best treatment.

To find the stage of a cancer, tests are done to see how big the cancer is and if it has spread to other parts of the body. A lower stage (such as a stage 1 or 2) means that the cancer has not spread very much. A higher number (such as a stage 3 or 4) means it has spread more.

How is cancer treated?

Cancer treatment depends on the type and stage of your cancer. It will also depend on tests that might be done

on your cancer cells to see if they have any changes that might affect treatment (biomarkers).

Cancer is treated with surgery, radiation, and medicines. More than one type of treatment is often used if they work better together.

Surgery is used to remove part or all of a cancer.

It may be the only treatment needed if the cancer is just in one place. Or surgery may be used along with other treatments.

Radiation can kill or slow the growth of cancer cells in one area of the body. Most radiation treatments are like getting an x-ray. But sometimes the radiation is placed inside your body close to the tumor.

Medicines are used to kill cancer cells or make them grow more slowly. They can treat cancer in any part of the body. These medicines are called chemotherapy, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, and hormone therapy.

Some of these medicines are given into a vein through a needle (IV). Other are given as a pill. And some are given in other ways like being put into the bladder. Each medicine works in a different way, so sometimes two or more are used together.

You and your cancer care team will decide together which treatment is best. The team will continue to support you through your treatment. They will answer questions, help manage side effects, and keep track of how your treatment is working.



To learn more, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

