



## Newly Diagnosed With Cancer? 9 Words You Should Know

Know these terms for help understanding your illness



Receiving a cancer diagnosis — or waiting to find out if you have cancer — is a scary, often confusing experience. Cancer has a language all its own, and if you're newly diagnosed, you may encounter many unfamiliar terms. Learning the basics can help you understand what's happening and regain a sense of control.

Here are nine cancer terms that all patients should know:

- 1. Oncology** – This is the branch of medicine that deals with the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Doctors who specialize in treating cancer are oncologists.
- 2. Tumor** – A tumor is an abnormal growth of cells. But not all tumors are cancerous. The term for tumors that are not cancerous is benign. The term for cancerous tumors is malignant. Benign tumors do not invade nearby tissue or other parts of the body the way malignant ones do.
- 3. Biopsy** – Your doctor may remove a sample of suspicious tissue to look at under a microscope. This procedure (biopsy) helps determine whether cancer is present. If you have cancer, the biopsy will help determine what kind it is. This helps doctors decide on the best approach to treatment. Doctors use needles to withdraw tissue samples for most biopsies. However, they may sometimes remove a tissue sample surgically.
- 4. Stages** – Doctors use a system of stages to describe the size of a cancer and how extensive the disease is in the body. They use different staging systems for different types of cancer.  
  
Staging the cancer helps doctors develop a prognosis and make treatment recommendations for each patient. Staging also provides a common language that helps doctors communicate about a patient's cancer and collaborate on the best courses of treatment.
- 5. Metastasis** – This refers to what cancer does when it spreads to another organ or area of the body. A cancer that has spread is a metastasis.

- 6. Chemotherapy** – Doctors may use medication to attack cancer cells throughout the body. There are different types of chemotherapy that work in different ways to kill the cancer cells.

Medical teams give most chemotherapy drugs for cancer by IV, but you may take some by mouth. Chemotherapy is usually systemic treatment, meaning that the drugs flow through the bloodstream to nearly every part of the body.

- 7. Immunotherapy** – This is a type of cancer treatment that uses the body's immune system to fight the cancer. As with chemotherapy, there are different types of immunotherapy. They work in different ways and their use depends on the type and severity of the cancer.
- 8. Radiation therapy** – Doctors also may use high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors. External radiation refers to radiation that comes from a source outside the body. Internal radiation refers to radiation that works inside the body.
- 9. Clinical Trials** – Clinical trials (or research studies) help us create the medicine of tomorrow. They provide hope through offering testing of new drugs, new surgical techniques or other treatments before they are widely available.

There are many types of cancer and cancer treatment, so you're bound to run into many other new terms as your treatment progresses.

Never hesitate to ask your doctor or other members of your treatment team to explain new terms to you. Understanding your illness helps you take good care of yourself and helps ensure that your treatment is as effective as possible.

Cleveland Clinic Cancer Center offers services that address the emotional, psychosocial and financial needs of our patients. For more information or additional patient resources, visit [clevelandclinic.org/cancersupport](http://clevelandclinic.org/cancersupport) or speak with your care team.

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