

ASCO ANSWERS

STOMACH CANCER

WHAT IS STOMACH CANCER?

Stomach cancer, also called gastric cancer, can begin in any part of the stomach. It may spread to nearby lymph nodes and other areas of the body, such as the liver, bones, lungs, and a woman's ovaries.

Most stomach cancers are a type called adenocarcinoma. Other, less common types of cancerous tumors that form in the stomach include lymphoma, gastric sarcoma, and carcinoid tumor.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE STOMACH?

The stomach is located in the upper abdomen and plays a central role in digesting food. When food is swallowed, it is pushed down the esophagus (the muscular tube that connects the throat with the stomach) and enters the stomach. The muscles in the stomach mix the food and release gastric juices that help break down and digest the food. The food then moves into the small intestine for further digestion.

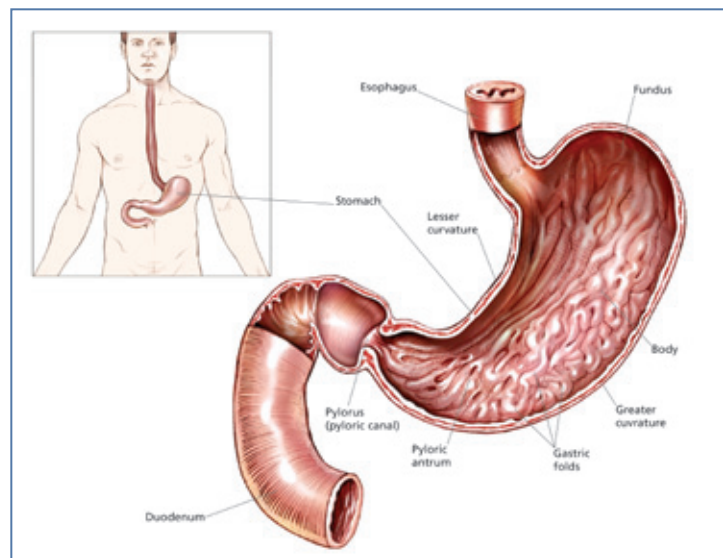


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing the cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are five stages for stomach adenocarcinoma: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Descriptions of these stages are available at www.cancer.net/stomach.

HOW IS STOMACH CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of stomach cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Stomach cancer may be treated with surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy. Often, a combination of these treatment methods is used. It may be difficult to cure stomach cancer because it is often not detected until it is in an advanced stage.

When the cancer is still contained within the stomach (stages 0 or I), treatment usually consists of surgery to remove the affected part of the stomach and nearby lymph nodes. If the cancer has spread to the outer stomach wall or to more than three lymph nodes (stages II or III), surgery plus chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy may be used. Advanced stomach cancer has spread to other areas of the body and is primarily treated with chemotherapy. The side effects of stomach cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH STOMACH CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are additional steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What type of stomach cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the stomach cancer?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- What is the goal of each treatment?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?



Learn more about
stomach cancer

- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/stomach.

Cancer.Net™ 

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

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For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

TERMS TO KNOW

Adenocarcinoma:

Cancer that begins in the glandular tissue that lines the inside of the stomach

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Endoscopy:

A procedure to examine the stomach using a thin, flexible tube called a gastroscope; may also be used to collect a tissue sample

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue