

ASCO ANSWERS

THYROID CANCER

WHAT IS THYROID CANCER?

Thyroid cancer begins when cells in the thyroid gland change, grow uncontrollably, and eventually form a tumor. The most common types of thyroid cancer are papillary and follicular; these types are often curable, especially when found early. Other types include medullary and anaplastic. Most tumors of the thyroid are not cancerous.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE THYROID?

The thyroid is a gland located in the front of the neck just below the larynx (voicebox). A normal thyroid gland has two lobes, one on each side of the windpipe, joined by a narrow strip of tissue called the isthmus. The thyroid is part of the endocrine system, which regulates hormones in the body. The gland absorbs iodine from the bloodstream to produce thyroid hormone, which regulates a person's metabolism.

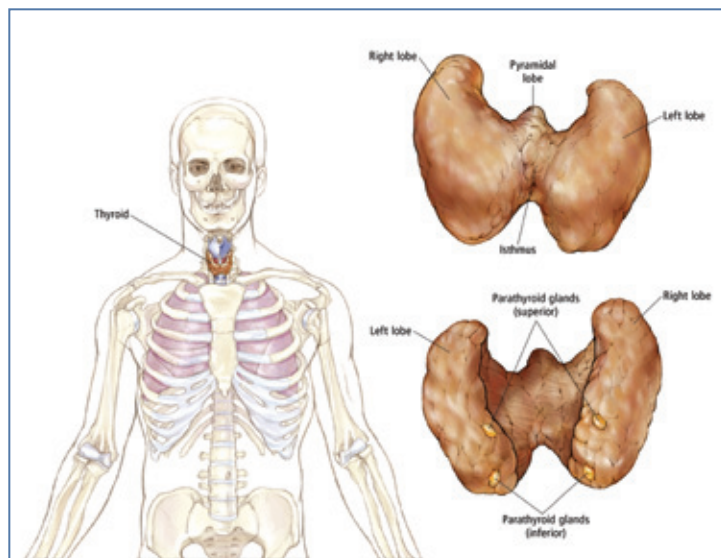


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

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 four stages for thyroid cancer: stages I through IV (one through four). Illustrations for these stages are available at www.cancer.net/thyroid.

HOW IS THYROID CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of thyroid cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, the type of thyroid cancer, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Treatment options include surgery, hormone therapy, radioactive iodine, external-beam radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapy. Surgery is the main treatment for thyroid cancer, and the amount of the thyroid removed depends on the tumor size, the type of thyroid cancer, and the person's age. People treated with surgery usually require hormone therapy to replace the thyroid hormone and slow the growth of any remaining cancer. Radioactive iodine (also called radioiodine therapy) may be used to eliminate cancer not removed by surgery and any cancer cells that have spread beyond the thyroid. Radiation therapy may be used when an advanced tumor has not responded to radioiodine therapy and is usually given after surgery. Chemotherapy and targeted therapy are occasionally used. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of thyroid cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH THYROID 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 other 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 thyroid cancer do I have?
- What is the stage of the cancer? What does this mean?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- Which treatment, or combination of treatments, do you recommend? Why?
- Who is part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- Who will be coordinating my overall treatment and follow-up care?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?



Learn more about
thyroid cancer

- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- 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?

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

Cancer.Net™

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

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

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TERMS TO KNOW

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

Endocrinologist:

A doctor who specializes in problems with glands and the endocrine system

Lobectomy:

Removal of a lobe in the thyroid

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

Thyroidectomy:

Partial or total removal of the thyroid

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue; may also be called a nodule