

ASCO ANSWERS

OSTEOSARCOMA

WHAT IS OSTEOSARCOMA?

Osteosarcoma is a cancer of the bone that destroys tissue and weakens the bone. It most often affects teens and young adults in their 20s. The cancer starts when immature bone cells become cancer cells instead of developing into bone. There are two types of osteosarcoma: medullary (central) tumor or a peripheral (surface) tumor. Each type has a number of subtypes; the most common one is conventional central osteosarcoma.

WHERE IS OSTEOSARCOMA FOUND IN THE BODY?

Osteosarcoma most often starts in the bones around the knee joint, at the lower end of the femur (thigh bone) or the upper end of the tibia (shin bone). The second most common place is the humerus (upper arm bone close to the shoulder). However, osteosarcoma can develop in any bone in the body. Rarely, osteosarcoma occurs as a tumor in the soft tissue of the body, outside of bone.

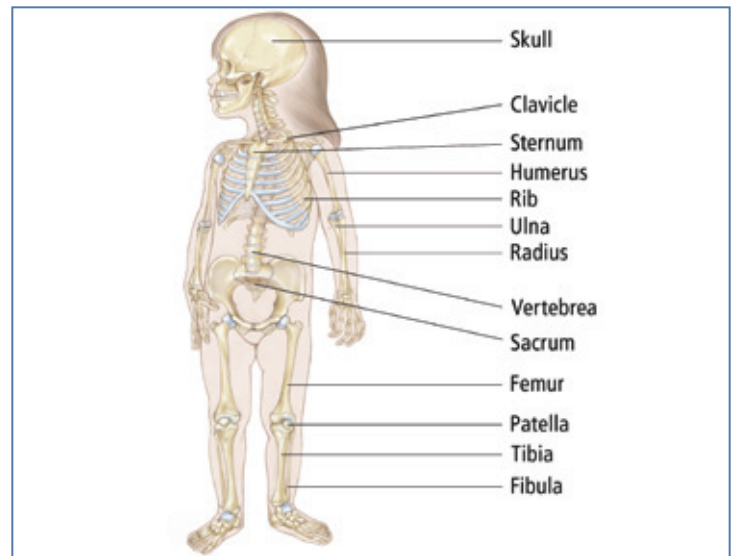


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing a 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. Doctors describe osteosarcoma as localized (hasn't spread from where the cancer started), metastatic (has spread to another part of the body), or recurrent (has come back after treatment). More information is available at www.cancer.net/osteosarcoma.

HOW IS OSTEOSARCOMA TREATED?

The treatment of osteosarcoma depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the tumor has spread, and the child's overall health. Surgery and chemotherapy are the most common forms of treatment. During surgery the orthopedic surgeon (bone surgeon) removes the tumor and some surrounding tissue. Limb-sparing surgery—surgery that helps the child keep the limb (arm or leg)—is used whenever possible. Chemotherapy is often given before surgery to reduce tumor size or after surgery to kill any remaining cancer cells. Occasionally, a limb may need to be amputated. In both types of surgery, physical therapy is important to help the child regain physical functioning.

When making treatment decisions, consider a clinical trial; most children with cancer are treated as part of one. Talk with your child's doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of osteosarcoma treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your child's health care team.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD OR TEEN COPE WITH OSTEOSARCOMA?

Helping your child or teenager understand a cancer diagnosis is a key part of the coping process. Children and adolescents with cancer should be treated at a pediatric cancer center. These centers not only provide access to the latest treatments, they offer age-appropriate programs for social and emotional needs. Encouraging your child and other family members to share their emotions 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 child's health care. Consider asking the following questions of your child's doctors:

- What type and subtype of osteosarcoma have been diagnosed? What does this mean?
- Is the disease located only in the bone where it started?
- Can you explain my child's pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Would you explain my child's treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to my child?
- What treatment plan do you recommend for my child? Why?
- Who is part of the treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my child's daily life? Will he or she be able to go to school and perform his or her usual activities?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my child's cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- What short-term and long-term side effects may be associated with my child's cancer treatment?



Learn more about
osteosarcoma

- What follow-up tests will my child need, and how often will he or she need them?
- Where can I find emotional support for my child? For 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/osteosarcoma.

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

Amputation:

Surgical removal of all or part of a limb

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

Clinical trial:

A research study that tests a new treatment or drug

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

Pediatric oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating children and teens with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Rehabilitation:

Process that helps a person obtain the best physical, social, and psychological functioning during and after cancer treatment

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue