

## **Carcinoid Tumor - Symptoms and Signs** [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 03/2014

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find out more about body changes and other things that can signal a problem that may need medical care. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A carcinoid tumor often causes no symptoms in its early stages and is often found unexpectedly by a surgeon during an unrelated surgery or on x-rays for another condition. Below you will find possible signs and symptoms of gastrointestinal carcinoid tumor, lung carcinoid tumor, carcinoid syndrome, and carcinoid crisis. However, these symptoms may also be caused by a medical condition that is not a carcinoid tumor.

If you are concerned about one or more of the symptoms or signs on any of these lists, please talk with your doctor. Your doctor will ask how long and how often you've been experiencing the symptom(s), in addition to other questions. This is to help find out the cause of the problem, called a [diagnosis](#) [3].

### **Symptoms: gastrointestinal carcinoid tumor**

Often, symptoms of a gastrointestinal carcinoid tumor only appear if the tumor spreads to the liver. In that case, the hormone-like substances produced by the tumor can travel throughout the body and cause carcinoid syndrome (see below), a group of symptoms caused by hormones being released by the tumor into the bloodstream. Intestinal carcinoid tumors are most likely to cause symptoms.

People with a gastrointestinal carcinoid tumor may experience the following symptoms or signs:

- Facial flushing (redness and warm feeling over the face)
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain caused by blockage of the intestines
- Asthma
- Rash
- Heart disease
- Intestinal bleeding
- Pellagra (scale-like skin sores, diarrhea, and mental disturbances)
- Melena (dark, tarry stools that contain blood and usually indicate there is bleeding)

somewhere in the gastrointestinal tract)

### **Symptoms: lung carcinoid tumor**

A carcinoid tumor in the lungs causes symptoms that result from hormones bypassing the liver and entering the bloodstream. A lung carcinoid tumor is far less likely to cause carcinoid syndrome (see below) than a gastrointestinal carcinoid tumor.

People with a lung carcinoid tumor may experience the following symptoms or signs:

- Cough, with or without bloody sputum or phlegm
- Wheezing
- Post-obstructive pneumonia (when a tumor blocking a large air passage causes an infection)

### **Carcinoid syndrome**

Carcinoid syndrome is more common in people who have had a carcinoid tumor for many years. Approximately 60% of people with a carcinoid tumor eventually develop carcinoid syndrome.

People with carcinoid syndrome may experience the following symptoms or signs:

- Facial flushing
- Sweating
- Diarrhea
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing or asthma-like symptoms
- Fast heartbeat
- Heart murmur
- Unexplained weight gain
- Weakness
- Secondary diabetes
- Increased body and facial hair
- High blood pressure and significant fluctuations in blood pressure
- Neurosis and psychosis? Neurosis is a psychological or behavioral disorder primarily characterized by anxiety. Psychosis is a severe emotional and behavioral disorder that can cause a person's mental capacity to become very distorted or disorganized, which may interfere with the person's ability to cope with the demands of everyday life.

Stress, strenuous exercise, and drinking alcohol may make these symptoms worse.

### **Carcinoid crisis**

Carcinoid crisis is a term used when all of the symptoms of carcinoid syndrome occur at the same time. Carcinoid crisis is the most serious and life-threatening complication of carcinoid syndrome. It generally occurs after a person has already experienced some symptoms of carcinoid syndrome. Carcinoid crisis may occur suddenly, or it can be brought on by stress, chemotherapy, or anesthesia. A carcinoid crisis may be prevented and successfully treated with octreotide (Sandostatin), a medication that helps raise low blood pressure and control the

production of hormones.

## Managing symptoms

If a carcinoid tumor is diagnosed, relieving symptoms remains an important part of cancer care and treatment. This may also be called symptom management, palliative care, or supportive care. Below are some common symptoms of a carcinoid tumor, followed by information on how each can be managed. Be sure to talk with your health care team about symptoms you experience, including any new symptoms or a change in symptoms.

**Facial flushing.** Avoid stress. Ask your doctor about specific substances and foods, including alcohol, that cause facial flushing so you can avoid them.

**Wheezing.** Ask your doctor about the use of a bronchodilator, a medication that relaxes the muscles in the lungs to make breathing easier.

**Diarrhea.** Ask your doctor about the use of anti-diarrheal medications.

**Carcinoid syndrome.** Ask your doctor about the use of octreotide, which is the most effective single medication against carcinoid syndrome.

**Heart problems.** Tell your doctor immediately if you think you may have a problem with your heart, and ask about the use of diuretics. Diuretics are drugs that increase the amount of urine by increasing function of the heart.

Learn more about [managing common cancer symptoms and treatment side effects](#) [4].

*The next section helps explain what tests and scans may be needed to learn more about the cause of the symptoms. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select **Diagnosis**, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.*

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/carcinoid-tumor/symptoms-and-signs>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18650>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25238>