

## **Liver Cancer - Overview** [1]

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

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Liver Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

### **About the liver**

The liver is the largest internal organ in the body, and its functions are essential for the digestion of food. No one can survive without a liver. Functions of the liver include:

- Collecting and filtering blood from the intestines
- Processing and storing needed nutrients absorbed by the intestines
- Chemically changing (metabolizing) some nutrients into energy or to repair and build tissue
- Producing some of the body's blood clotting factors
- Removing toxins from the body
- Helping maintain the proper sugar level in the body

### **Types of liver cancer**

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread.

Primary liver cancer is cancer that begins in the liver. It is more common for the liver to be the site of metastasis (spread) of a cancer that started in another place, such as pancreatic, colon, stomach, breast, or lung cancer. However, these are not primary liver cancer. For more information about cancer that started in another part of the body and has spread to the liver, [read about that specific cancer type](#) [3].

This section only covers adult primary liver cancer. The subtypes of adult primary liver cancer are named for the type of cell from which they develop. These subtypes are described below.

### **Types of adult primary liver cancer**

Type of Liver Cancer	Description	How Common
Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC)	Hepatocellular carcinoma can have different growth patterns. Some spread tentacle-like growths through the liver. This pattern is the most common one in the United States. Some start as a single tumor that spreads to other parts of the liver as the disease develops. Others develop as nodules at several different places in the liver. Occasionally, a pattern isn't clear.	Approximately 80% of adult primary liver cancers are hepatocellular carcinomas.
Cholangiocarcinoma (also called <u>bile duct cancer</u> [4])	Cholangiocarcinomas grow from cells in the bile duct of the liver. The bile duct is a thin tube that extends from the liver to the small intestine. The bile duct starts inside the liver as several smaller tubes that join together.	About 10% to 20% of adult primary liver cancers are cholangiocarcinomas.
<u>Angiosarcoma</u> [5]	Angiosarcoma starts in the blood vessels of the liver and grows very quickly.	About 1% of adult primary liver cancers are angiosarcomas.

The remainder of this section discusses the most common type of adult primary liver cancer, hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

## Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore these related items. Please note these links take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet](#) [6]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to this type of cancer.
- [Cancer.Net En Español](#) [7]: Read about liver cancer in Spanish. Infórmase sobre [cáncer de hígado](#) [7] en español.
- View a short video produced by the Hawaii Society of Clinical Oncology in the [Tagalog language](#) [8] or [Ilocano language](#) [9] with information about this cancer. Panoorin ang isang maikling video na ito sa wikang [Tagalog](#) [8] na may impormasyon tungkol sa kanser na ito. Buya-en daytoy ababa nga [Ilokano](#) [9] a bidyo maipanggep kadagiti impormasyon kadetoy a kanser.

*To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.*

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**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/liver-cancer/overview>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18505>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19604>
- [6] [http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco\\_answers\\_liver.pdf](http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_liver.pdf)
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/18079>
- [8] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEbUO\\_fPmbU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEbUO_fPmbU)
- [9] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jK8hJgUonMQ>