

[Home](#) > [Types of Cancer](#) > [Parathyroid Cancer](#) > Parathyroid Cancer - Overview

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Parathyroid Cancer - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 11/2015

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 Parathyroid 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 parathyroid glands

The parathyroid glands are four small glands. They are located near the thyroid gland in the neck or chest, which is also called the upper mediastinum. They are part of the endocrine system. Like all parts of the endocrine system, the parathyroid glands play an important role regulating hormones in the body. These glands make parathyroid hormone (PTH), which regulates the levels of calcium and phosphorus in the blood.

About parathyroid cancer

Cancer begins when healthy 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 grow and spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor can grow but will not spread. A parathyroid tumor usually develops in one of the four parathyroid glands. The most common treatment for parathyroid tumors is surgery. Radiation therapy is only recommended occasionally in the treatment of parathyroid cancer.

A parathyroid tumor, whether it is benign or malignant, can cause significant effects because the amount of calcium in the blood rises, resulting in a serious condition called [hypercalcemia](#) [3]. The doctor may need to treat hypercalcemia quickly if the patient is having life-threatening

symptoms.

This section covers tumors found in the parathyroid glands. Learn more about tumors that begin in the [thyroid gland](#) [4] in a separate section.

The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [5] and it helps explain how many people are diagnosed with this disease and general survival rates. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/parathyroid-cancer/overview>

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25255>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31262>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19510>