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Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 02/2012

Cancer in young adults isn't common, and people in this situation have unique concerns and challenges compared with kids or older adults with cancer. For an introduction to this topic, [watch a video with Melissa Hudson, MD](#) [3].

About cancer in young adults

Cancer is the name for a group of more than 100 diseases that occurs when cells in the body form a lump or mass called a tumor. A tumor may be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). A benign tumor does not spread to other parts of the body and is rarely life threatening. A malignant tumor on the other hand invades and destroys nearby tissues and spreads to other parts of the body. [Learn more about cancer](#) [4].

If you have been diagnosed with a cancer commonly found in children and teens, such as lymphoma, leukemia, or a bone tumor, may be treated in a way similar to children and teens. In these situations, you may be referred to a pediatric oncologist to receive the best possible care.

If you have been diagnosed with a cancer commonly found in adults, such as melanoma, testicular cancer, or ovarian cancer, you will likely be treated in the same way as other adults. In this situation many young adults often need specialized programs or services for young adults with cancer. For this reason, you may consider being treated at a specialized cancer center where different types of oncologists (doctors who treat people with cancer) and other health care professionals work together to plan your treatment and provide support. This way, your doctors will have access to the newest treatments and will be familiar with these diseases.

The following types of cancers are the most common among young adults:

- [Brain tumors](#) [5]
- [Breast cancer](#) [6]
- [Cervical cancer](#) [7]
- [Colorectal cancer](#) [8]
- [Leukemia](#) [9] (cancer of the blood and bone marrow)
- Lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes, the tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight disease), including [non-Hodgkin](#) [10] and [Hodgkin lymphoma](#) [11]

- [Melanoma](#) [12] (a type of skin cancer)
- [Ovarian cancer](#) [13], [testicular cancer](#) [14], and other [germ cell tumors](#) [15]
- [Soft tissue sarcoma](#) [16] (cancer that begins in supportive and connective tissue, such as fat, muscle, nerves, tendons, joints, blood vessels, and lymph nodes)
- [Thyroid cancer](#) [17] (cancer that begins in the thyroid gland, which is located in the front of the neck)?

Doctors are learning that biology of cancer in young adults differs from cancer in older adults, and this information may help guide the development of better treatments in the future. Learn more about specific [cancer types](#) [9] and the ongoing research and treatment options available.

Special concerns for young adults with cancer

Young adults with cancer often face a different set of challenges than older and younger people with cancer that affect their diagnosis and treatment. These are listed here:

- Even if a person has symptoms of cancer, he or she and the health care team may not act on these symptoms because cancer isn't a likely explanation.
- Young adults may not have health insurance or have limited financial resources to pay for cancer treatment, even if they have health insurance. Find out more about [managing the cost of your cancer care](#) [18].
- Many young adults have no previous experience receiving care for a complex diagnosis, such as cancer, and may have trouble navigating the health care system. Learn more about [managing your cancer care](#) [19].
- In addition, young adults have a wide range of emotional, physical, and social concerns, including [relationships](#) [20], [sexuality](#) [21], [parenthood](#) [22], [education](#) [23], and [employment](#) [24].

More Information

[ASCO Expert Corner: Young Adults With Cancer](#) [25]

[Resources for Young Adults With Cancer](#) [26]

[Cancer in Young Adults: Things to Know](#) [27]

Links:

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/young-adults/being-young-adult-cancer/overview>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25429>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Newly+Diagnosed/What+is+Cancer/What+is+Cancer>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Brain+Tumor>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Breast+Cancer>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Cervical+Cancer>
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- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Lymphoma+--+Hodgkin>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Melanoma>

- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Ovarian+Cancer>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Testicular+Cancer>
- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Germ+Cell+Tumor+--+Childhood>
- [16] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Sarcoma>
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- [21] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Young+Adults/Cancer+and+Your+Body/Common+Sexual+Concerns/Common+Sexual+Concerns>
- [22] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Cancer.Net+Feature+Articles/Family%2C+Friends%2C+and+Caregivers/Parents>
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