

Stomach Cancer

What is stomach cancer?

Stomach cancer, also called gastric cancer, begins when healthy cells change and grow out of control, forming a tumor. Cancer can begin in any part of the stomach and may spread to nearby lymph nodes or other areas of the body, such as the liver, bones, lungs, and a woman's ovaries.

Most stomach cancers are a type called adenocarcinoma. Other, less common types of cancerous tumors that form in the stomach include lymphoma, gastric sarcoma, and carcinoid tumors.

What is the function of the stomach?

The stomach is located in the upper abdomen and plays a central role in digesting food. When food is swallowed, it is pushed down the muscular tube called the esophagus, which connects the throat with the stomach. Then, the food enters the stomach. The stomach mixes the food and releases gastric juices that help break down and digest the food. The food then moves into the small intestine for further digestion.

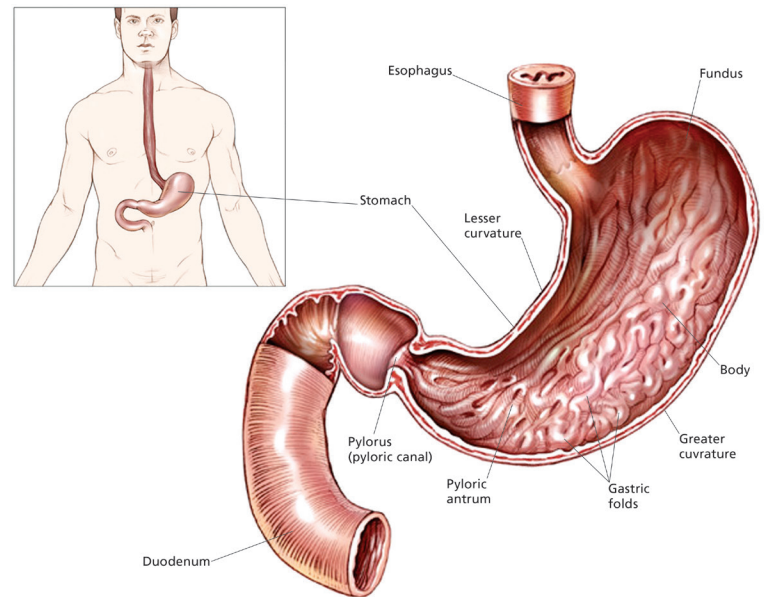


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What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are 5 stages for stomach adenocarcinoma: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (1 through 4). Find more information at www.cancer.net/stomach.

How is stomach cancer treated?

The treatment of stomach cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Stomach cancer may be treated with surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or targeted therapy. Often, a combination of these treatments is used. It may be difficult to cure stomach cancer because it is often not found until it is in an advanced stage.

When the cancer is only found in the stomach (stages 0 or I), surgery is used to remove the part of the stomach with cancer and nearby lymph nodes. If the cancer has spread to the outer stomach wall, chemotherapy plus surgery or radiation therapy may be used. Stomach cancer that has spread to other parts of the body is mainly treated with chemotherapy. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of stomach cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called palliative care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

How can I cope with stomach cancer?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

Questions to ask the health care team

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking your health care team the following questions:

- What type of stomach cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the stomach cancer? What does this mean?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are available for me? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities? Will my eating habits need to change?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs of cancer care, who can help me?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom should I call with questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Find more questions to ask the health care team at www.cancer.net/stomach. For a digital list of questions, download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app.

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WORDS TO KNOW

Adenocarcinoma:

Cancer that begins in the glandular tissue that lines the inside of the stomach

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

Endoscopy:

A procedure to examine the stomach using a thin, flexible tube called a gastroscope; may also be used to collect a tissue sample

Gastroenterologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating conditions of the gastrointestinal tract

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where it began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating cancer

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue

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