

# **All You Want to know about Cancer**

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### **What is Cancer?**

The body is made up of cells which grow and die in a controlled way. Sometimes, cells keep on growing without control, causing an abnormal growth called a tumour. A tumour can be benign (harmless), premalignant (if left untreated, may lead to cancer) or malignant (progressively worsens and can result in death). Cancer is a malignant tumour.

### **How does Cancer Start?**

Every cell has a DNA which controls its actions like growth, division, death etc. When DNA gets damaged & is not repaired, cell goes on making new cells that the body does not need. Thus, cells become cancerous because of DNA damage.

Cancer cell growth is different from normal cell growth. Instead of dying, cancer cells continue to grow and form new, abnormal cells. Cancer cells can also invade (grow into) other tissues, which normal cells cannot do.

DNA damage (change in the DNA known as mutation) can be inherited (passing of traits from one generation to other) or due to environmental agents such as radiation, tobacco or a combination of both.

### **What are the Types of Cancer?**

A solid tumor is a localized (existing only in a particular organ) mass of abnormal cells. Eg lung cancer, brain cancer. Cancers of the blood or bone marrow (soft part inside the bone), are referred to as 'liquid tumors' because they do not form a defined mass of abnormal cells like solid tumors.

### **How does Cancer Spread?**

Cancer cells can grow & invade nearby organs. They can also spread via bloodstream or lymph (milky fluid) of the body to distant organs where they begin to grow and form new tumors. This process is called metastasis.

# What are the Common Symptoms of Cancer?

Some symptoms of the cancer can be general whereas some are specific to the organ that is affected. Following are the common symptoms that may be associated with cancer:

**Unexplained weight loss and fatigue**



**Pain**



**Fever**



**Changes in bowel or bladder habits**



**Pale skin**



**Tiredness**



**Poor or no appetite**



## Some Specific Symptoms are

**Thickening or lump in part of the body e.g. breasts (breast cancer)**



**Indigestion or difficulty swallowing e.g. Oesophageal cancer**





**Some symptoms can be due to spread of cancer cells to other organs.**

## **How is Cancer Diagnosed?**

If cancer is suspected, the doctor will decide the tests that may help diagnose the cancer. Some common diagnostic tests include X-rays, MRI, blood tests, endoscopy (thin, lighted tube used to look into various body parts), biopsy (viewing of tissue sample under microscope) etc.

Not all of them are needed, doctor will decide the tests that are necessary.

## **How can Cancer be Treated?**

Various therapies are used for the treatment of cancer e.g. removal of tumour (surgery), killing cancer cells with drugs (chemotherapy) or radiation (radiotherapy). Treatment depends on the type and stage of the cancer and can include any of these therapies or a combination.



## **Who is at Higher Risk of Developing Cancer?**

Some common risk factors for cancers include tobacco use especially smoking, excessive alcohol use, low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, high body mass index (BMI), family history, exposure to environmental carcinogens (cancer causing agents) like radon, multiple sexual partners etc

## **How Can The Risk of Cancer be Reduced?**

### **Lifestyle Changes**

The risk of developing most types of cancer can be reduced by changes in a person's lifestyle, for example,



## Vaccination

Vaccines can also help reduce the risk of some cancers. The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine helps prevent most cervical cancers and some vaginal and vulvar cancers. Hepatitis B vaccine prevents hepatitis B infection that can later develop into liver cancer and thus helps reduce liver cancer risk.

**Sooner a cancer is found and treated, better the survival.**

For more information, **please consult the doctor**