

If a person has symptoms that might be cancer, their doctor will suggest some tests. These tests can show if the person has cancer. They can usually show where the cancer is in the body.

There are some common tests for cancer. A person with symptoms might have more than one of these tests. You can take someone you know to the tests with you.

Ask your doctor or the person doing the test:

- to explain anything you do not understand
- to arrange an interpreter if you need one

Examination

If a person has unusual swelling, the doctor will look at and feel the swelling. If a person has pain, the doctor will feel the painful area. The doctor may also feel around a swelling or area of pain.

Blood or urine test

Some cancers (for example, prostate cancer, ovarian cancer) make substances that go into the blood or urine. This tells the doctor that there is cancer in the body. The doctor may take some blood, using a needle and syringe, or ask for a urine sample. The doctor will send the blood or urine to a laboratory to be tested.

X-ray or scan

(X-ray, CT scan, MRI, IVP, radioisotope bone scan, ultrasound)

These tests use machines to scan the body. They make pictures showing what is inside the body, for example, organs, tumours. The machines use a very safe dose of radiation, magnetic fields, radio waves or sound waves to help make the pictures.

Before a scan, the person might have a drink or injection of a special fluid. This fluid helps to highlight parts inside the body. The person might be asked not to eat or drink for a few hours before the scan.

The scanning machine is in a special room. The person who operates the machine may stay in the room, or go into a room nearby.

If you have a scan, you might be asked to take off some clothes and put on a special gown. The person who operates the machine will show you where to lie. The machine moves around you or over you, taking pictures. The space in the machine may be small. If you are anxious about being in a small space, tell the person operating the machine. Try to relax by closing your eyes. Sometimes the machines can be noisy.

Scans are usually done at a hospital or special clinic. Some take about five minutes and some take longer. It is normal for a person having a scan to feel a bit worried. Scans do not hurt you or make you sick.

Scoping tests

(cystoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, endoscopy, bronchoscopy, hysteroscopy)

In these tests, a very small tube with a light and camera attached is put into the body. The doctor can move the tube around. The camera shows pictures of the inside of the body on a screen like a television. The doctor can also put in a tube to remove tissue to look at under a microscope. This is called a biopsy.

Before having one of these tests, a person might be asked not to eat or drink anything for a few hours. Sometimes a person is asked to drink a special fluid before the test; this helps make the pictures clear.

A person might have a sedative before the test so they relax. With some of the tests, people also have an anaesthetic so they do not feel any pain.

These tests are usually done in a hospital and take about an hour. People need to allow about one hour before and one hour after the test.

► *English*

Cancer information line:

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Diagnosing cancer



Page 2 of 2

They can usually go home when the anaesthetic has worn off.

Doctors need to know before the test if a person is taking any medicines. Some medicines can affect how a person recovers from the test.

People usually feel anxious when they have one of these tests. They sometimes feel a bit sore after the test but this will not last for long.

Biopsy

A biopsy removes some cells so they can be looked at under a microscope. If the cells are in fluid, they can be taken out with a syringe. If the cells are in tissue, they can be taken out using a small knife or similar instrument. Cancer cells look different from normal cells, so a pathologist can tell if any cells are cancerous. (A pathologist is the doctor who looks at the biopsy.) The cells in the biopsy need to be stained so the pathologist can judge whether it is cancer or not. It can take up to a week to get the results of the biopsy.

Before having a biopsy, a person has an anaesthetic so they do not feel pain. Sometimes it just numbs an area, but often a person has a general anaesthetic, which makes them sleep. A person is asked not to eat or drink for a few hours before a general anaesthetic. The doctor stitches the skin afterward if this is needed.

Most biopsies are done in a hospital. Minor biopsies can be done in a doctor's surgery. A biopsy takes about fifteen minutes. Allow more time before and after the biopsy to prepare for and recover from the anaesthetic.

It is normal for people to feel anxious when they have a biopsy. Sometimes they are a bit sore after the test but this does not last for long. The doctor will explain how to care for stitches across the wound.

How you might feel if you have cancer

These tests can show if a person has cancer, where it is and if it has spread. If the tests show you have cancer, your doctor will explain what this means and what you can expect.

Results from most of these tests usually take a few days to be sent to the doctor who has taken the tests. A person may need to have more than one test, so it may be a few days or weeks before they know if they have cancer.

People usually feel shocked and frightened if they are told they have cancer. If you are told you have cancer, you may want to talk about your feelings with friends or relatives. Or you could ask your doctor about contacting a counsellor.

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