

What is cancer?

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Cancer is a disease of cells. The human body is made of millions of cells. Our bodies are always making new cells: so we can grow, to replace worn-out cells or to heal damaged cells after an injury.

Genes are the parts of a cell that tell it what to do. Some genes tell a cell when to multiply.

Cancer is caused by damaged genes. Genes can be damaged by many things in our environment like too much sunlight, cigarette smoke or what we eat. Sometimes damaged genes are passed from a parent to a child.

Normal genes tell cells when to multiply and when to die. This is happening in your body all the time. But damaged genes sometimes tell cells to multiply too much or stop cells from dying when they should. These extra cells continue to grow and may make a lump, called a tumour. Some tumours can be felt and others can not be felt. Some tumours are benign, which means they are not cancer. Others are malignant, which means they are cancer.

At first, a cancer will grow in the place where it started. This is called a primary cancer. A primary cancer can grow big enough to cause symptoms.

Later, some cancer cells may leave the primary cancer and go to other parts of the body. They travel through the bloodstream or lymphatic system. These cells can make new cancers in other parts of the body. These are called secondary cancers or metastases. Sometimes a person does not know they have cancer until they get symptoms from a secondary cancer.

Cancer can occur almost anywhere in the body. The blood and lymph tissue can develop cancer.

A person cannot 'catch' cancer from another person. Many people get cancer and more than half of them survive. Cancer affects people from all countries, races and religions. It affects about one in every three people in Australia.

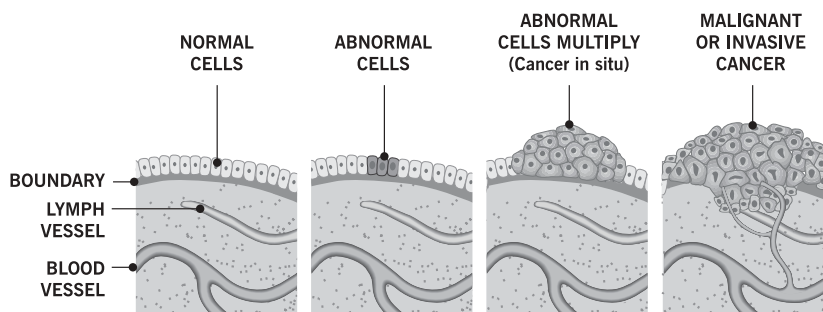
Everyone with cancer deserves support and the best treatment that is available.

► *English*

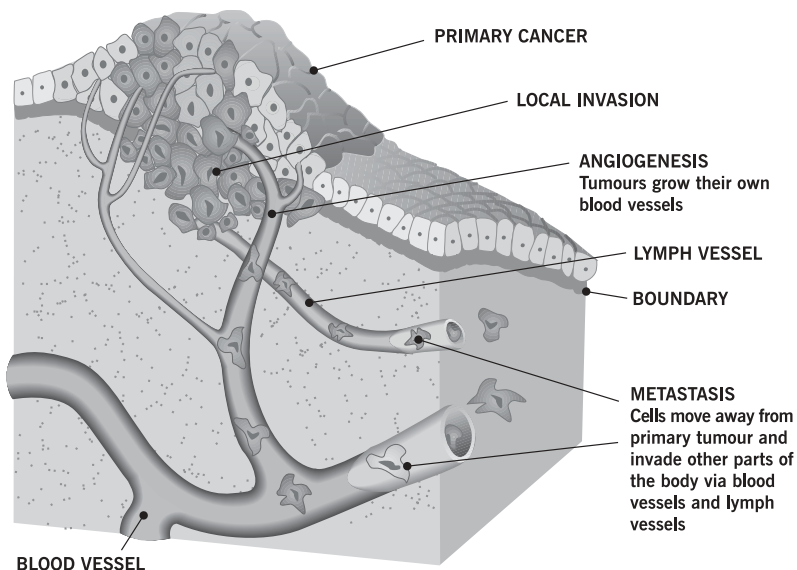
Cancer information line:

• English
13 11 20

THE BEGINNINGS OF CANCER



HOW CANCER SPREADS



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