

What is cancer?

For people with cancer, their families and friends

Cancer is a disease of the body's cells.

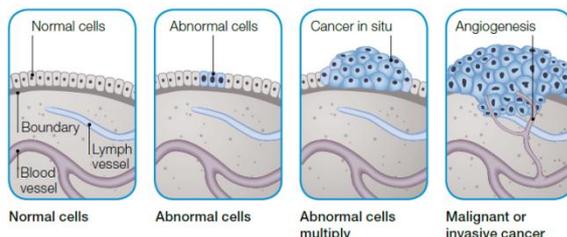
Cancer is a disease that has to do with the body's cells. The body is made up of billions of cells. Normal cells grow and divide (split in two). When they die, they are replaced by new cells.

Sometimes, something goes wrong with some cells and they don't die. They divide out of control and may grow into a lump (tumour) called cancer.

Cancers can start anywhere in the body. There are over 100 different types of cancer. Some cancers are more common than others, such as cancer of the bowel, breast, prostate and lung.

- Cancer is very common – one in three people get cancer.
- Many people survive cancer.
- Cancer won't go away without treatment

The beginnings of cancer



Cancerous and non-cancerous

Tumours can be *non-cancerous* (benign) or *cancerous* (malignant).

Non-cancerous tumours do not spread to

other parts of the body. However, a doctor needs to monitor them.

A *cancerous tumour* can spread from where it begins to other parts of the body. It can spread into tissue near the tumour and be carried in the blood or lymph to other parts of the body. The cancer that grows in the new place is called a 'secondary cancer' or 'metastasis'.

How do you get cancer?

Cancer can happen to anybody. We don't know the causes of most cancers.

Some things put people at greater risk of getting cancer:

- Getting older: young people can get cancer, but most types of cancer become more common over the age of 50
- Smoking
- Too much alcohol
- Lack of exercise
- Too much sun exposure
- Not eating a healthy diet
- Being overweight
- Family history. This affects only a small number of families.

Some chemicals and asbestos can increase a person's cancer risk.

Some viruses sometimes lead to cancer, such as human papilloma virus, which is a very common virus spread by sex.

Can you catch cancer from someone else?

No. Cancer is not contagious. People can't get cancer from someone who has it.

It is safe to be with someone who has cancer. Touching people with cancer is safe.

Finding cancer early

Many cancers can be successfully treated if they are found by a doctor and treated early.

Attend screening programs. Screening for breast, bowel and cervical cancer saves lives.

Know what is normal for your body. See your doctor straight away if you notice unusual changes like:

- Lumps, sores or ulcers that don't heal
- Unusual breast changes: lumps, lumpiness, a thickened area, unusual nipple discharge, a nipple that turns inwards (if it hasn't always been that way), a change in shape or colour or unusual pain
- Persistent cough, breathlessness or hoarseness
- Unexplained weight or blood loss
- Persistent nausea or vomiting
- For women, any loss of blood from the vagina, even if it's a few spots between your periods (menses) or after menopause
- Moles that change shape, size or colour, or bleed
- Blood in a bowel motion (faeces)
- Prolonged or unexplained diarrhoea or constipation

- pain anywhere in the body that does not get better.

Some of these symptoms are due to common health problems, not cancer.

See a doctor about any persistent symptoms or changes in your body.

What happens if I have cancer?

Treatment depends on the type and stage of a cancer (how advanced it is). The most common treatments are chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery and immunotherapy.

The doctor will discuss treatment to help cure or control the cancer.

Cancers that are found and treated early are often cured.

The **Multilingual Cancer Information Line** provides callers with information about cancer in their language, call **13 14 50** and ask for the Cancer Council Victoria Helpline to talk confidentially with a cancer nurse with the help of an interpreter

Call **13 11 20** for information and support in English.

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