

Understanding cancer talk

Doctors may use words you don't understand. It's okay to ask them to explain something again.

Understanding cancer

advanced disease

Disease that has spread outside the organ or tissue to other places in your body

benign

Not cancer. Does not invade or spread to other parts of the body although it may grow bigger and still cause some troubles

biopsy

The removal of a small bit of the lump or tumour, which is examined under a microscope to help diagnose disease

cancer

The name for more than 200 diseases where abnormal cells multiply and grow without control

cancer-in-situ

Early stage cancer. This usually means that the total cancer can be removed with surgery or biopsy

curable

Cancer that can be made to disappear for good

diagnosis

Working out what kind of cancer someone has

incurable

A cancer that doesn't go away for good but can be controlled for a period of time

localised cancer

Cancer that is confined to a small area or areas

lymphatic or glandular system

Glands are part of the body's defence system that protects your body from sickness and disease

lymph glands or nodes

Part of the lymphatic system. They are small bean shaped glands found in the body in places like the neck, groin, armpit, chest and abdomen.

malignant

Cancerous. Can spread to other parts of the body.

UNDERSTANDING CANCER TALK

Understanding cancer

metastasis	When cells from the cancer spread from one part of the body to another. Also called secondary cancer
oncology	The study, diagnosis and treatment of cancer
primary site	Where the cancer first starts in the body
prognosis	What is likely to happen when someone has a disease, especially their chance of getting better and what might happen after treatment
staging	Tells how far the disease has spread in the body. This can be done by scans, x-rays or during surgery
tumour (too-mer)	A lump in the body caused by uncontrolled growth of cells. Can be benign or malignant. Also called a neoplasm or mass
tumour marker	A substance in your blood or blood tissue that helps doctors to see if cancer is present. For example, PSA is a marker for prostate cancer

Types of cancers

carcinoma (car-sin-oma)	A tumour that starts in the cells of the skin and the body's organs
leukaemia (le-k-em-i-a)	A cancer that forms in the bloodstream (blood cancer)
lymphoma (lim-ph--oma)	A cancer that forms in the lymphatic or the glandular system (glands) of the body
sarcoma (sar-co-ma)	A tumour that starts in parts of the body like bone, cartilage and muscle that hold the body together

Doctors might use these words to describe different types of cancers.

UNDERSTANDING CANCER TALK

Treatment words

adjuvant therapy	After surgery removes or reduces cancer, treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy are offered
alopecia	Medical term for hair loss. This is sometimes a side effect of chemotherapy.
anaemia	When blood does not carry enough red cells and oxygen to the rest of the body. It can cause tiredness and fatigue
anti-emetic	A medicine that reduces feelings of sickness (nausea) and vomiting (spuing)
biological therapy	Uses your body's natural defence mechanisms to help fight the disease
blood test	Taking some blood, often from a vein in the arm, by using a thin needle
bone marrow	The soft, spongy material inside bones. The bone marrow contains stem cells that produce the three types of blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets
bone marrow and stem cell transplantation	A medical procedure used to replace bone marrow destroyed by high doses of chemotherapy with healthy bone marrow. Used to treat diseases of the blood, bone marrow and certain cancers.
chemotherapy (also called chemo)	Uses medicines to treat cancer. Chemo can be given through a needle (intravenously) or by swallowing tablets or liquid (orally)
clearance margins	When tumours are removed, surgeons also remove an area of good tissue around the cancer. This is to ensure they have removed it all. This is called a clearance margin
complementary treatments	Treatments that can be used with regular cancer treatments. For example, massage, music therapy, meditation, bush medicine
cycles	Chemo is normally given at regular intervals. Each one of these is called a cycle. It is followed by a period during which the body recovers

You will hear doctors use these words during treatment.

UNDERSTANDING CANCER TALK

Treatment related words

genetics	The study of heredity and the way a parent passes certain genes on to their children
intravenous or IV	An intravenous drip gives fluids directly into a vein. Generally the drip is put in your arm or hand
lymphoedema	Chronic swelling (oedema) of part of the body that can occur after cancer treatment. It usually develops slowly and can appear months after treatment for cancer
mucositis	An inflammation of the lining of the mouth, throat or gut. It is common after cancer treatment
nausea	A feeling like you are going to vomit (spu). It makes you feel weak
neutropenia	A decreased number of white cells in your blood. This increases the risk of infection, which sometimes happens after chemotherapy
outpatient	People visit a hospital for treatment but don't stay overnight
palliative care	A team to support someone with advanced or terminal cancer and their families. It focuses on relieving symptoms. You can have it at home; it respects all beliefs
platelets	Cells in the blood that help your blood to clot. If you cut yourself, clotting helps the bleeding to stop
prosthesis	An artificial substitute for a missing body part such as an arm, leg or breast
radiotherapy (radio/radiation therapy)	A common way to treat cancer. Uses high energy rays to shrink or stop the cancer from getting bigger
red cells	Cells in the blood that carry oxygen around the body
surgery	An operation to remove or reduce cancer
transplantation	When you receive a body part, tissue or cells from another person or your own body
white cells	Cells in the blood that fight infections

UNDERSTANDING CANCER TALK

Many different people may care for you when you are having treatment for cancer. Who you see will depend on the type of cancer you have.

People who work with cancer

cancer care coordinator	One person who assists in coordinating your care during your treatment
dietitian	A specialist who helps with your nutrition. Sometimes they may offer special foods or drinks
endocrinologist	A doctor who specialises in hormones for the body, such as diabetes or thyroid disease and others
gynaecologist	A doctor for women’s reproductive business
haematologist	A doctor who specialises in the treatment of diseases in the blood and bone marrow
medical oncologist	A doctor who uses medicines such as chemotherapy and hormone therapy to treat cancer
multidisciplinary team (MDT)	A group of specialists who work together to treat your cancer
neurologist	A doctor for the brain and nervous system
oncologist	A doctor who specialises in treating cancer
pathologist	A doctor who specialises in examining cancers under the microscope
pharmacist	A specialist who provides advice on medications prescribed by your doctor
radiation oncologist	A specilist doctor who prescribes radiotherapy and organises the treatment
surgeon	A doctor who removes cancer from the body

For more information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit www.cancercouncil.com.au
- Visit www.menzies.edu.au/cancer