

C A N C E R

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is cancer?

Cancer is a group of many related diseases. All forms of cancer involve the out-of-control growth and spread of abnormal cells. Normal body cells grow, divide, and die in an orderly fashion. During the early years of a person's life, normal cells divide more rapidly until the person becomes an adult. After that, normal cells of most tissues divide only to replace worn-out or dying cells and to repair injuries. Cancer cells, however, continue to grow and divide, and can spread to other parts of the body. Cancer cells may accumulate and form tumors (lumps) that may compress, invade, and destroy normal tissue. It is important to know that all tumors are not cancerous. Noncancerous tumors are called benign tumors.

What is metastasis?

The spread of a tumor to a new site is called metastasis. When cancer cells break away from a tumor, they can travel through the bloodstream, or the lymph system to other areas of the body. When cancer spreads, it is still named after the part of the body where it originated. For example, if prostate cancer spreads to the bones, it is still called prostate cancer.

How is cancer classified?

Cancer is classified by the part of the body in which it began, and by its appearance under a microscope. Different types of cancer vary in their rates of growth, patterns of spread, and response to treatment.

What are the symptoms of cancer?

Cancer can cause a variety of symptoms. When symptoms occur, they are *not* always caused by cancer. It is important to see your physician about any symptom or physical changes that are of concern to you. Only a doctor can make a diagnosis. The treatment of cancer is most successful when detected early. Some of the symptoms that may occur with cancer are listed below:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Change in bowel or bladder habits
- Sores that do not heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Indigestion or difficulty swallowing
- Thickening or lump in breast or other parts of the body
- Recent change in wart or mole
- Cough or hoarseness
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Pain

If you experience these symptoms or have any questions about other symptoms or changes, please call your physician.