

Cancer

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Est. **1 min** reading time

Cancer is a disease of the cells in the body. There are many different types of cells in the body, and many different types of cancer which arise from different types of cells.

At a glance

- Cancer happens when abnormal cells multiply out of control.
- There are many different types of cancer that behave differently.
- Some cancers grow and spread more quickly than others.
- Some cancers are easier to treat, especially if found early.
- Treatments include chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgery.
- The specific type of cancer affects treatment and outlook.

This summary has been automatically generated from the article content to help readers quickly understand the key points.

What is cancer?

Cancer occurs when cells become abnormal and multiply out of control. Different cells in the different parts of the body when multiplied cause different cancers.

Some grow and spread more quickly than others and some are easier to treat than others, particularly if diagnosed at an early stage.



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Treatments can vary – some respond to chemotherapy, **radiotherapy**, or other treatments, while some may need surgery.

Some cancers have a better outlook (prognosis) than others – having a very good chance of being cured. For some types of cancer, the **outlook is much poorer** and therefore these have to be managed in a different way.

So, each cancer is different and behaves differently. We cannot put 'cancer' into one box. In each case it is important to know exactly what **type of cancer** has developed, how large it has become, whether it has spread and how well the particular type of cancer responds to various treatments. This will enable you to get reliable information on treatment options and outlook.

Frequently asked questions

Does having cancer automatically mean it is difficult to treat?

Not necessarily. Some cancers are easier to treat than others, especially if they are found early. The effectiveness of treatment also varies depending on the specific type of cancer.

Will all cancers require the same treatment approach?

No, treatments for cancer can vary significantly. Some cancers respond well to chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or other medical treatments, while others might require surgery. The most suitable treatment depends on the specific cancer type.

Does cancer always have a poor outlook?

No, the outlook (prognosis) for cancer is not always poor. Some types of cancer have a very good chance of being cured. However, for other types, the outlook may be poorer, requiring different management strategies.

Why is it important to know the specific type of cancer I have?

Knowing the exact type of cancer you have is crucial because each cancer behaves differently. This information helps determine its size, whether it has spread, and how it might respond to various treatments, allowing for reliable



information on treatment options and prognosis.

These questions and answers have been generated from the information in this article.

Further reading and references

- **Kirkegaard H, Johnsen NF, Christensen J, et al** [\[1\]](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=20978063) (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=20978063); Association of adherence to lifestyle recommendations and risk of colorectal cancer: a prospective Danish cohort study. *BMJ*. 2010 Oct 26;341:c5504. doi: 10.1136/bmj.c5504.
- **What is Cancer?** [\[2\]](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/what-is-cancer) (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/what-is-cancer>); National Cancer Institute

About the author [View full bio](#)

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Dr Krishna Vakharia is an NHS GP. She is also a regular examiner for the postgraduate Diploma in Practical Dermatology at Cardiff University as well as being the Chief Medical Officer for health at Optum UK.

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Dr Hayley Willacy was an NHS GP working in northwest England, who retired from clinical practice in 2022 after 30 years.

Article history

The information on this page is written and peer reviewed by qualified clinicians.

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