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Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

Advanced cancers are not usually curable, but can be treatable. Symptom management is also an important part of treatment for advanced cancer.

- [Understanding Advanced and Metastatic Cancer](#)
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Understanding Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

If you or a loved one is told that you have advanced cancer, it's very important to find out exactly what the doctor means. Some may use the term to describe metastatic cancer, while others might use it in other situations. Be sure you understand what the

What is advanced cancer?

Advanced cancer is most often used to describe cancers that cannot be cured. This means cancers that won't totally go away and stay away completely with treatment. However, some types of advanced cancer can be controlled over a long period of time and are thought of as an ongoing (or chronic) illness.

Even if advanced cancer can't be cured, treatment can sometimes:

- Shrink the cancer
- Slow its growth
- Help relieve symptoms
- Help you live longer

For some people, the cancer may already be advanced when they first learn they have the disease. For others, the cancer may not become advanced until years after it was first diagnosed.

Advanced cancers can be locally advanced or metastatic.

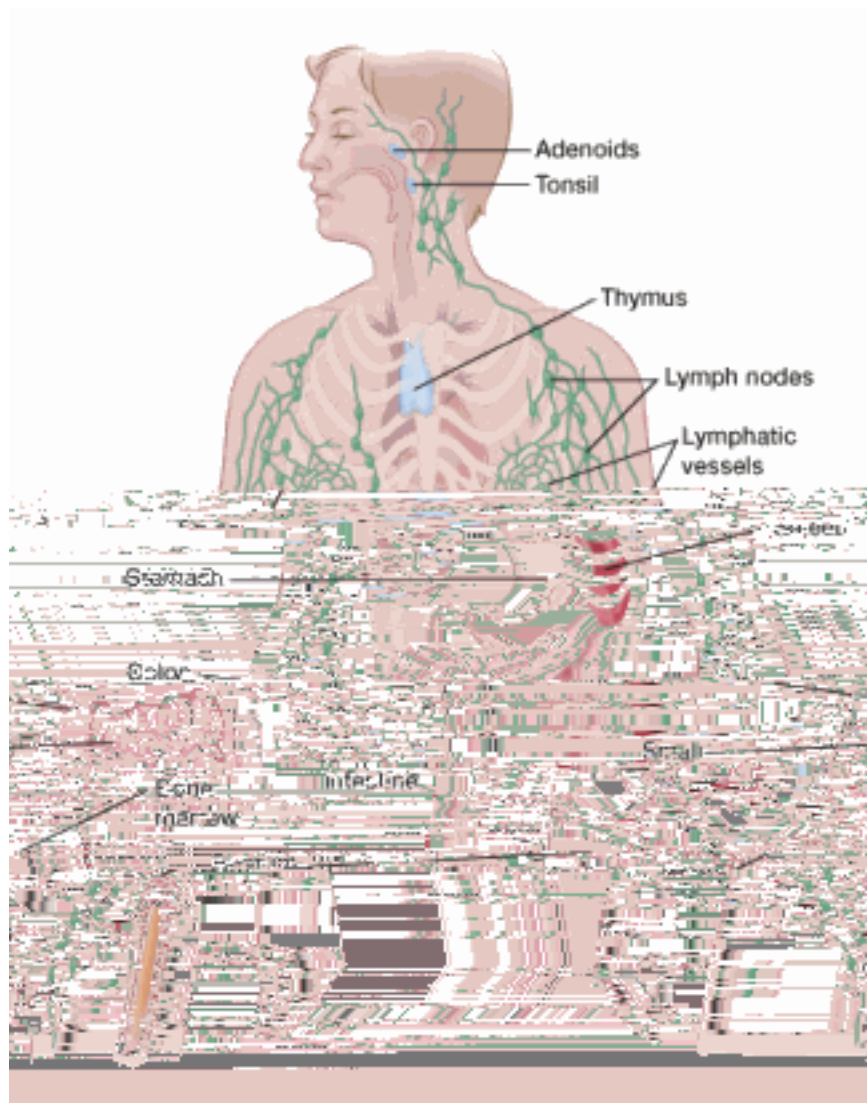
Locally advanced means that cancer has grown outside the body part it started in but has not yet spread to other parts of the body. For example, some cancers that start in the brain may be considered advanced because of their large size or closeness to important organs or blood vessels. This can make them life-threatening even though they haven't spread to other parts of the body. But other locally advanced cancers, such as some prostate cancers, may be cured.

Metastatic cancers have spread from where they started to other parts of the body. Cancers that have spread are often thought of as advanced when they can't be cured or controlled with treatment. Not all metastatic cancers are advanced cancers. Some cancers, such as [testicular cancer](#)¹, can spread to other parts of the body and still be very curable.

As advanced cancer grows, it can cause [symptoms](#). These symptoms can almost always be managed with treatment, even when the cancer itself no longer responds to treatment.

What is metastatic cancer?

Metastatic cancer is a cancer that has spread from the part of the body where it started (the primary site) to other parts of the body. When cancer cells break away from a tumor, they can travel to other parts of the body through the bloodstream or the lymph system. (Lymph vessels are much like blood vessels, except they carry a clear fluid and immune system cells.)



This image shows some parts of the lymph system, like lymph nodes and lymph vessels, as well as organs and tissues that contain many lymphocytes (immune cells).

If the cells travel through the lymph system, they could end up in nearby lymph nodes (small, bean-sized collections of immune cells) or they could spread to other organs. More often, cancer cells that break off from the main tumor travel through the bloodstream. Once in the blood, they can go to any part of the body. Many of these cells

die, but some may settle in a new area and start to grow.

Cancer cells must go through several steps to spread to new parts of the body:

- They must find ways to break away from the original tumor and enter the bloodstream or lymph system.
- They need to attach to the wall of a blood or lymph vessel and move into a new body part.
- They need to find ways to grow and thrive in their new location.
- They must be able to avoid attacks from the body's immune system.

When cancer spreads to a new area, it's still named after the part of the body where it started. For instance, breast cancer that has spread to the lungs is called "metastatic breast cancer to the lungs" – it's not lung cancer. Treatment is also based on where the cancer started. If prostate cancer spreads to the bones, it's still prostate cancer (not bone cancer), and the doctor will choose treatments that have been shown to help against metastatic prostate cancer. Likewise, colon cancer that has spread to the liver is treated as metastatic colon cancer, not liver cancer.

Sometimes the metastatic tumors have already begun to grow when the cancer is first found. And sometimes, a metastasis may be found before the original (primary) tumor is found. If a cancer has already spread to other parts of the body before it's first diagnosed, it may be hard to figure out where it started.

Why cancer cells tend to spread to the parts of the body they do

Where a cancer starts is linked to where it will spread. Most cancer cells that break free from the primary tumor are carried in the blood or lymph system until they get trapped in the next "downstream" organ or set of lymph nodes. This explains why breast cancer often spreads to underarm lymph nodes, but rarely to lymph nodes in the belly. Likewise, there are many cancers that commonly spread to the lungs. This is because the heart pumps blood from the rest of the body through the lungs' blood vessels before sending it elsewhere.

Possible symptoms of advanced and metastatic cancer

General signs and symptoms of advanced and metastatic cancer can include:

- Loss of energy and feeling tired and/or weak: This can get so bad that you may

have a hard time doing everyday tasks like bathing or getting dressed. People with advanced cancer often need help with these things.

- Weight loss (without trying)
- Pain
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing

Advanced and metastatic cancers can cause many other [symptoms](#)², depending on the type of cancer and where it has spread.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/testicular-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html

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Managing Advanced Cancer

Many advanced cancers can't be cured, but they can most often be treated. You should

know if the goal of treatment is to cure the cancer, slow its growth and help you live longer, or relieve symptoms. Even if the goal is not to cure the cancer, physical symptoms can be managed most of the time.

- [Making treatment choices](#)
- [Managing symptoms of advanced cancers](#)

Making treatment choices

Treatment choices for advanced cancers depend on the type of cancer, where the cancer started, and how much it has spread into the area around it. In general, cancer that has spread will need treatment that reaches all parts of the body, such as [chemotherapy](#)¹, [targeted therapy](#)², [immunotherapy](#)³ or [hormone therapy](#).⁴ These treatments are taken by mouth or infused into the blood. Therapies, such as [surgery](#)⁵ or [radiation](#)⁶, only treat a certain part of the body but can help prevent or relieve certain symptoms. And relieving symptoms like pain, constipation, upset stomach, and vomiting can help you feel better. Something can almost always be done to help

You might have many symptoms when cancer is in different parts of your body. Not everyone will get all of these symptoms. In many cases, these symptoms are not caused directly by the cancer or can have more than one cause. Your cancer care team can tell you the most about where the cancer is and what symptoms it might cause.

Common symptoms that are treated and controlled or relieved by palliative care can include the following:

- [Pain](#)⁹
- [Depression and anxiety](#)¹⁰
- [Fatigue and weakness](#)¹¹
- [Loss of appetite](#)¹²
- [Weight changes](#)¹³
- [Nausea and vomiting](#)¹⁴
- [Constipation](#)¹⁵
- [Belly swelling \(ascites\)](#)¹⁶

Cancer that has spread to certain parts of the body such as the [brain](#), [bone](#), [liver](#), and [lungs](#) may cause other symptoms. You can find more information about these metastases in other pages in this section.

Again, the goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of the disease.

Other symptoms you may have include shortness of breath and bowel and kidney blockages. These are very serious situations and require treatment right away.

Shortness of breath (dyspnea)

Shortness of breath is one of the most common symptoms that people with advanced cancer can have. Shortness of breath can have many causes. It can be caused by cancer or cancer treatment. It may also be caused by other problems such as [infection](#)¹⁷, [low blood counts](#)¹⁸, or other lung conditions.

Being short of breath can be very troubling. It can limit what people are able to do and can make [fatigue](#)¹⁹, [anxiety](#)²⁰, and [depression](#)²¹ worse. Not everyone whose cancer has advanced will become short of breath, but it helps to know what to expect, when to call your doctor, and how it might be managed.

Shortness of breath can happen quickly or build over time. If you have [shortness of breath](#)²² that comes on quickly, be sure to call your doctor right away. This may be caused by a problem that needs to be treated as soon as possible.

Call 911 if new shortness of breath starts suddenly and doesn't get better; your skin, mouth, or nail beds look pale or blue in color; or if you have chest pain or pressure, trouble speaking, dizziness, or weakness.

(obstruction) keeps food and stool from moving through. This leads to severe cramping, belly pain, and throwing up. If the blockage in the bowels isn't opened, the pressure that builds up can create a hole (a perforation) that lets the contents of the intestine spill into the abdomen. Bacteria from the intestine can cause a severe infection. This can cause even worse pain, and nausea and vomiting. An obstruction is very serious and must be treated right away.

It can be hard to treat obstructions with surgery because many patients are too sick. Other times the cancers are so large that surgery may not help for long. The risks of surgery should be compared to the chances of returning to a comfortable life.

If the bowel is blocked in only one area, a small, stiff tube called a stent may be put through the blocked area to help keep it open. This can be done without surgery and may be an option for some blockages of the colon and the small intestine.

If a stent won't work operations called [colostomies](#)²⁴ or [ileostomies](#)²⁵ may help. The surgeon cuts the large or small bowel above the block. The cut end is then connected to an opening (stoma) on the skin of the abdomen (belly). Stool then comes out into a bag that's put around the opening.

If surgery or stents aren't practical, treatment of the symptoms may be the good choice. For instance, the stomach's contents can be removed through a tube placed through the nose, down the throat, and into the stomach. (This called a nasogastric or NG tube.) The NG tube is attached to a suction device to gently take out the contents of the stomach. This often relieves nausea and vomiting and may help keep pressure from building up and causing other problems.

bladder and through the ureters to keep them open and let urine flow again. Another option is to put a tube through the skin and right into the kidney to allow the urine to drain into a bag outside the body. This is called a nephrostomy.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/hormone-therapy.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html
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8. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/fatigue.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/poor-appetite.html
13. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/weight-changes.html
14. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html
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23. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/practice-mindfulness-and-

- [relaxation.html](#)
24. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/self-management.html
 25. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/colostomy.html
 26. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/ileostomy.html

Bone Metastases

- [Drugs to treat bone metastases](#)

Normally, bone is maintained by 2 kinds of bone cells.

- Osteoblasts form new bone
- Osteoclasts break down old bone

When these cells are both working the way they should, new bone is always forming while old bone is being broken down. This helps keep the bones strong.

When cancer cells spread to the bone, they block or speed up the action of the osteoblasts and osteoclasts, too much bone is broken down or too much bone is made. Either of these changes can make bones break easier than normal.

Bone metastases (mets) can cause other problems as well:

- When cancer spreads to the bones of the spine, it can press on the spinal cord. This can cause nerve damage that **may lead to paralysis if not treated right away**.
- As too much bone dissolves, calcium is released into the blood. This can lead to problems caused by high blood calcium levels (hypercalcemia).

Signs and symptoms of bone metastases

It's very important to tell your cancer care team about any new symptoms you have. Finding and treating bone metastases early can help prevent problems later.

Pain

Bone pain is often the first symptom of cancer that has spread to the bone. The pain may come and go at first. It tends to be worse at night and may get better with movement. Later on, it can become constant and may be worse during activity. The bone might be so weak that it will break. This can often be prevented if the bone metastasis is found early.

There are many ways to treat pain caused by bone metastases. The treatment will depend on the type of cancer as well as the number and location of bone metastases. Sometimes treatment being used to treat the main (primary) cancer will help shrink the

metastases. Other times, medicines made to stop the effects of the cancer on the bone may be given (See *Drugs to treat bone metastases* below). In addition, some more local treatments, like [radiation therapy](#)⁸ or even [surgery](#)⁹, can help relieve the pain.

Pain medicines are also very helpful. Many kinds of pain medicines are used to treat [cancer pain](#)¹⁰. There are also a lot of ways the medicines can be taken, such as pills, patches, and pumps that let you put the medicine into your body when you need it.

Fractures (broken bones or breaks)

Breaks might happen with a fall or injury, but a weak bone can also break during normal activities. These breaks often cause sudden, severe pain. Fractures most often happen in the long bones of the arms and legs and the bones of the spine. Sudden pain in the middle of the back, for instance, may mean a bone in the spine has broken.

When possible, your doctor will try to prevent the fracture. Medicines may be given to try and strengthen the bones which can help prevent fractures (see *Drugs to treat bone metastases* below). Cancer in the bone may cause severe pain for a while before the bone breaks. If an x-ray shows an arm or leg bone is likely to break, surgery may be done to put a metal rod in the weak part of the bone.

If the bone has already broken, surgery is usually done to put a steel support over the broken part of the bone. If bones of the spine break, a bone cement might be injected into the damaged bones (vertebroplasty or balloon kyphoplasty). This can help support the bone.

Radiation treatments may be given after surgery to try to prevent any more damage. The radiation won't make the bone stronger, but it might stop further damage.

If you feel confused, dizzy, or weak, talk with your cancer care team about safety equipment you can use at home, such as shower chairs, walkers, or handrails.

Spinal cord compression

Cancer growing in the bones of the back can press on the spinal cord. One of the earliest symptoms of spinal cord compression is pain in the back or neck.

If a spinal cord compression isn't treated right away, the person can become paralyzed. Most often this affects the legs (so that the person can't walk) but if the tumor is pressing on the spinal cord in the neck, the arms and the legs can be affected.

Spinal cord compression can show up in different ways:

- Back pain (sometimes with pain going down one or both legs)
- Numbness of the legs or belly
- Leg weakness or trouble moving your legs
- Loss of control of urine or stool (incontinence) or problems passing urine

If you notice symptoms like these, call your doctor right away or go to the emergency room.

If the cancer is just starting to press on the spinal cord, treatment can help prevent paralysis and help relieve the pain. Radiation is often used as part of the treatment, sometimes with a type of medicine called a steroid or corticosteroid. The radiation often is started right away, within the first 12 to 24 hours.

If the spinal cord is already showing signs of damage (such as weakness in the legs), immediate surgery followed by radiation may be the best treatment. This may allow a patient to walk and function better than if they get radiation alone. People with very advanced cancer or other serious medical problems may not be able to have this kind of surgery.

High blood calcium levels

When cancer spreads to the bones, too much calcium from the bones can be released into the bloodstream. This is called hypercalcemia.

High blood calcium levels can cause problems such as

- Constipation
- Passing urine often
- Feeling sluggish or sleepy
- Feeling thirsty all the time and drinking lots of liquids
- Muscle weakness
- Muscle and joint aches
- Confusion
- Coma
- Kidney failure.

Treatment includes giving large amounts of intravenous (IV) fluids to protect the

affected kidneys and medicines such as bisphosphonate drugs (see below) to bring blood calcium levels down quickly. Once the calcium level is back to normal, treating the cancer can help keep the calcium level from getting too high again.

How are bone metastases found?

Bone mets may be seen on imaging tests that take pictures of the body. Some common imaging tests used to check for bone mets include:

- X-ray
- CT or CAT scan
- MRI
- PET scan
- Bone scan

Bone mets may be found because a person is having pain, or if the doctor is looking to see if the cancer has spread anywhere else in the body. Sometimes, a bone biopsy may also be done.

Drugs to treat bone metastases

The drugs used most often for treating bone problems in people with bone metastases are the bisphosphonate drugs **pamidronate (Aredia)** and **zoledronic acid (Zometa)** and the drug **denosumab (Xgeva)**. These drugs are given intravenously (IV

Your doctor will probably recommend that you have a dental checkup before starting treatment. That way, any dental problems can be taken care of before starting the drug. They might also recommend taking calcium and Vitamin D supplements while on the medicine to help your body build bone.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer.html
 2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html
 3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer.html
 4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/kidney-cancer.html
 5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer.html
-

Brain Metastases

Brain metastases develop most often in people with lung cancer, breast cancer, and melanoma, but also with other types of cancer. Brain metastases can be found at the same time as the primary cancer or later.

- [Symptoms of brain metastases](#)
- [Treatment of brain metastases](#)

Brain metastases are usually single spots, but some types of cancer can cause meningitis (swelling of the linings of the brain). This is mostly seen with leukemias, lymphomas, or very advanced forms of other types of cancer. Symptoms of meningitis from cancer can be harder to pick out.

Symptoms of brain metastases

Symptoms of brain metastases depend on the location, size and number of growths in the brain, or the amount of swelling. Metastases can push on or cause swelling in specific areas causing specific symptoms. Not everyone with a brain metastasis will have symptoms but most do.

The most common symptoms are:

- Headache
- Not being able to move parts of your body, like an arm or leg
- Sleepiness
- Memory problems
- Changes in emotions or how a person acts
- Problems hearing, seeing, or swallowing
- Seizures
- Nausea or vomiting

Treatment of brain metastases

Anti-seizure medicines may also be used if a patient has had a seizure. This can help prevent more seizures.

[Radiation therapy](#)¹ is often used to manage brain metastases and control symptoms. For people with several brain metastases or meningitis from cancer, whole brain radiation can be used. This can help improve symptoms and prevent them from getting worse.

Surgery is also sometimes used to treat brain metastases, especially if there are no more than three spots. For some people, a specialized procedure called [stereotactic radiosurgery](#)² may be used. Either procedure is most often followed by whole brain radiation therapy for the best results.

Chemotherapy is not usually a treatment for brain metastases because these medicines have a hard time getting into the brain. However, for people with meningitis from cancer, chemotherapy may be injected right into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. This can be done during a lumbar puncture (needle into the back) or through a device called an [Ommaya reservoir](#).³

An Ommaya reservoir is a dome-like device that is placed under the skin of the head and accessed with a needle. If the patient has an Ommaya reservoir, they can get chemo into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord without having to get repeated lumbar punctures.

For a few types of cancer, there are new medicines that can get into the brain when given into a vein. Your cancer care team will let you know if this treatment is an option for you.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-adults/treating/radiation-therapy.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-children/treating/surgery.html

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Liver Metastases

The liver is a common site for metastases from many cancer types. Cancers that spread to the liver most often are colorectal cancer, as well as breast, esophageal, stomach, pancreatic, lung, kidney, and melanoma skin cancers.

- [Symptoms of liver metastases](#)
- [Treatment of liver metastases](#)

Symptoms of liver metastases

Cancer in the liver can cause different symptoms based on how much of the liver is involved. Some common symptoms include

- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired or weak
- Fever
- Itchy skin
- Yellowing of the whites of the eyes or skin (jaundice)
- Bloating belly
- Leg swelling

- Pain in the upper right part of the abdomen (belly) (less common)

If there are a lot of metastases in the liver and it can't work well, people can get a condition called **hepatic encephalopathy**. This can cause confusion, sleepiness, and even coma.

Treatment of liver metastases

Surgery to remove the metastases may be an option if there are a small number of tumors in the liver and they are not in areas that would affect normal liver function. A different procedure called [ablation](#)¹ might also be an option. In ablation, a thin needle is put into the tumor. The treatment (such as a high energy current) is passed through the needle to destroy the cancer cells.

[Radiation therapy](#)² may also be an option for treating liver metastases. This may involve radiation to the whole liver. Or if there are a small number of metastases, a specialized procedure called [stereotactic radiosurgery](#)³ may be used.

Chemotherapy may be used for certain kinds of cancer. This may be given into a vein in your arm or right into a blood vessel leading to the liver.

Sometimes a procedure can be done to block the blood supply to the cancer. This is called [embolization](#)⁴.

If a person has hepatic encephalopathy, treatment will depend on how severe symptoms are. A person who is confused, sleepy, or in a coma will likely be treated with medicines such as lactulose, lactitol, or rifaximin. These medicines decrease the level of one of the toxins (ammonia) that can build up in the blood.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/liver-cancer/treating/tumor-ablation.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/liver-cancer/treating/embolization-therapy.html

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Lung Metastases

The types of cancer that most often spread to the lungs include breast, colon, rectum, head and neck, kidney, testicular and uterine cancers, as well as lymphomas. Other types of cancer can also spread to the lungs, but do so less often.

- [Symptoms of lung metastases](#)
- [Treatment of lung metastases](#)

Symptoms of lung metastases

The most common symptoms of lung metastases are:

- Coughing
- Bringing up blood when coughing.
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Fluid around the lungs
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss

Treatment of lung metastases

Treatment for lung metastases is usually based on the main type of cancer (primary site) the person has. Treatment may include [chemotherapy](#),¹ [immunotherapy](#)² or

[radiation therapy](#),³ or a combination of these.

Surgery may be an option if there are a small number of lung metastases and there are no metastases in other parts of the body. Also, surgery would only be used if the main cancer is under control.

Controlling symptoms is important, especially if treatment for the main cancer is not effective or may take a while to help. [Shortness of breath](#)⁴

[changes/anxiety.html](#)

6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain/cancer-pain/non-medical-treatments-for-cancer-pain.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html

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Coping with Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

Living with advanced cancer can be very different for each person. It is important to understand what you can expect with your [type](#)¹ and [stage](#)² of cancer. Set up time to

talk to your cancer care team to talk about your concerns and ask your questions.

- [Making treatment decisions about advanced cancer](#)
- [Facing family issues](#)
- [Finding hope](#)
- [Finding support](#)

You may want to ask questions such as:

- What do you think I should expect at this point?
- What are my options? Are there effective treatments available for me?
- What's the goal of treatment right now? Control of the cancer? Comfort?
- How long do you think I can live with this cancer? What's the range of survival times for people in my situation? Am I going to die soon?
- How often will I need treatment or need to see the doctor?
- What tests will I need to watch for changes in the cancer?
- What symptoms do I need to watch for and tell you about?
- What can be done for symptoms I have (pain, fatigue, nausea, etc.)?
- What if I decide I don't want any more treatment?
- What support options are there for me?
- How will I pay for treatment? Will my health insurance cover it?

Making treatment decisions about advanced cancer

Getting answers to your questions can help you decide what your next steps should be. Will you pursue treatment to try and manage your cancer on an ongoing basis, or will you decide that you'd rather not undergo treatment?

[Palliative care](#)³ can be helpful for anyone with advanced cancer, whether they decide to get more cancer treatment or not. Palliative care is not the same as hospice. Palliative care focuses on improving quality of life by helping patients and caregivers manage the symptoms of a serious illness and side effects of treatment. Palliative care can be helpful for people of any age and at any stage in a serious illness. Palliative care should be used whenever a person has symptoms that need to be controlled.

For some people, advanced cancer can be [managed as a chronic illness](#)⁴. With this approach, the cancer and symptoms can be controlled for a long period of time with cancer therapy. Palliative care can be provided at the same time to control symptoms of

the cancer and the treatment.

For some, the best option may be to not get more treatment and instead focus on having the best quality for the rest of their lives. Palliative care can be very helpful in managing symptoms, dealing with the feelings about having cancer, and handling concerns about death. When a person nears the end of their life, a transition is often made to [hospice](#)⁵.

What is most important is that each person makes the [best decision for themselves](#)⁶. It is essential to understand your options and decide what is best for you.

Facing family issues

Illness that goes on for months or even years can put a huge stress on the family. The longer the stress lasts, the more at risk the family is for mental [distress](#)⁷. Family members may become exhausted in body and mind. Fatigue added to worry and fear can take a toll.

Advanced cancer changes the way family members relate to one another. Families that can solve conflicts well and who support each other tend to do best in dealing with a loved one's cancer. Families who found problem-solving hard in the past are likely to have more trouble dealing with this stressful situation. You might want to meet with a counselor and work together to plan how best to support each other and plan for problems that may come up.

Roles within the family may change, too. How family members take on new tasks and fill in for the person with cancer affects how they will adjust to losing that person.

For the person with cancer, the changes in family roles can trigger the grief that comes with loss. For instance, a woman who's too sick to get out of bed may feel the loss of her role as a wife and/or mother. Understanding this and finding ways for her to still be involved in her family's day-to-day life may help both her and her family.

People with cancer often say that lack of communication in their families is a problem. Changes in duties can cause resentment and anxiety. Family counseling might help family members learn to deal with the changes that are taking place. It can also help members learn to discuss their feelings more comfortably. Counseling is especially helpful in families where some members don't feel comfortable openly talking about their feelings.

The needs of family members and caregivers are important, too. See our information for

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/staging.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/cancer-as-a-chronic-illness.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/distress.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/cancer-as-a-chronic-illness.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/distress.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/depression.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html
13. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html
14. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html
15. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/understanding-psychosocial-support-services.html
16. www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services.html
17. www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services/online-communities.html

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