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## If You Have Mesothelioma

If you or someone you know has just been diagnosed with mesothelioma, this short guide can help. Find information on mesothelioma here.

- [What is mesothelioma?](#)
- [How does the doctor know I have mesothelioma?](#)
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### What is mesothelioma?

Cancer can start any place in the body. Cancer that starts in the linings of certain parts of the body is called mesothelioma. It most often happens in the linings of the chest or abdomen (belly). It starts when cells in the lining grow out of control and crowd out normal cells. This makes it hard for the body to work the way it should.

Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body. Cancer cells in the lining can sometimes travel to nearby organs and tissues and grow there. When cancer cells spread, it's called metastasis. To doctors, the cancer cells in the new place look just like the ones from the lining.

Cancer is always named for the place where it starts. So when mesothelioma in the chest spreads to the spine (or any other place), it's still called mesothelioma. It's not called bone cancer unless it starts from cells in the spinal bones.

### Different types of mesothelioma

- **Pleural** mesothelioma starts in the chest around the lungs. This is by far the most

common type.

- **Peritoneal** mesothelioma starts in the lining in the abdomen or belly.
- **Pericardial** mesothelioma starts in the lining that covers the heart.
- Mesothelioma **of the tunica vaginalis** starts in the cover around the testicles.

Mesothelioma is also grouped into 1 of 3 types based on how the cancer cells look:

- About half of all mesotheliomas are **epithelioid** tumors and tend to have a better outlook.
- **Sarcomatoid or fibrous** tumors are about 1 out of 10 mesotheliomas.
- **Mixed or biphasic** tumors have parts that look like both of the other types. About 3 or 4 out of 10 are this type.

### ***Questions to ask the doctor***

- Why do you think I have mesothelioma?
- Where is it?
- Is there a chance I don't have cancer?
- Would you please write down the kind of mesothelioma you think I might have?
- What will happen next?

### **How does the doctor know I have mesothelioma?**

The doctor asks you questions about your health and does a physical exam. If signs are pointing to mesothelioma, you will need to have more tests.

Here are some of the tests you may need:

**Chest x-ray:** This is often the first test done to look for problems with your lungs. If a change is seen, you'll need more tests.

**CT scan:** This is also called a "CAT scan." It's a special kind of x-ray that takes pictures of your insides. CT scans can also be used to help do a biopsy (see below).

**PET scan:** In this test, you are given a special type of sugar that can be seen inside your body with a camera. If there's cancer, the sugar shows up as "hot spots" where the cancer is found. This test looks at the whole body. It can help if the doctor thinks the

cancer has spread, but doesn't know where.

**MRI scan:** This test uses radio waves and strong magnets instead of x-rays to make detailed pictures. MRI scans are helpful in looking at soft tissues.



## Surgery

If your cancer is small and/or hasn't spread, your doctor may suggest surgery, along with other treatments. If surgery can be done, it offers the best chance of a cure. It can also be used to ease problems caused by the cancer.

Sometimes, fluid collects in the chest and causes breathing problems. This fluid can be taken out by putting a small tube in the chest. After the fluid is drained out, a drug is put into the tube. This helps seal the space and keep fluid from building up again.

Most of the time, radiation and/or chemo is used along with surgery.

### ***Side effects of surgery***

Any type of surgery can have some risks and [side effects](#)<sup>1</sup>. Be sure to ask the doctor what you can expect. If you have problems, let your doctor know. Doctors who treat people with mesothelioma should be able to help you with any problems that come up.

## Radiation treatment

Radiation uses high-energy rays (like x-rays) to kill cancer cells. In mesothelioma, it's most often used after surgery to kill any cancer cells that may be left behind. Radiation can also be used to relieve symptoms such as pain, bleeding, trouble swallowing, or other problems. It's given in small doses every day for many weeks.

### ***Side effects of radiation treatments***

If your doctor suggests radiation as your treatment, talk about what side effects might happen. The most common side effects of radiation are:

- Skin changes where the radiation is given
- Feeling very tired

Most side effects get better after treatment ends. Some might last longer. Talk to your cancer care team about what you can expect.

## Chemo

Chemo (the short word for treatment) is the best treatment for mesothelioma.



your symptoms. These may not always be standard medical treatments. These treatments may be vitamins, herbs, special diets, and other things. You may wonder about these treatments.

Some of these are known to help, but many have not been tested. Some have been shown not to help. A few have even been found to be harmful. Talk to your doctor about anything you're thinking about using, whether it's a vitamin, a diet, or anything else.

### ***Questions to ask the doctor***

- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What's the goal of this treatment? Do you think it could cure the cancer?
- Will treatment include surgery? If so, who will do the surgery?
- What will the surgery be like?
- Will I need other types of treatment, too?
- What's the goal of these treatments?
- What side effects could I have from these treatments?
- What can I do about side effects that I might have?
- Is there a clinical trial that might be right for me?
- What about special vitamins or diets that friends tell me about? How will I know if they are safe?
- What should I do to be ready for treatment?
- Is there anything I can do to help the treatment work better?
- What's the next step?

### **What will happen after treatment?**

You'll be glad when treatment is over. But it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. Even when cancer never comes back, people still worry about it. For years after treatment ends, you will see your cancer doctor. Be sure to go to all of these follow-up visits. You will have exams, blood tests, and maybe other tests to see if the mesothelioma has come back.

Having cancer and dealing with treatment can be hard, but it can also be a time to look at your life in new ways. You might be thinking about how to improve your health. Call us or talk to your cancer care team to find out what you can do to feel better.

You can't change the fact that you have cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life – making healthy choices and feeling as well as you can.

### For connecting and sharing during a cancer journey

Anyone with cancer, their caregivers, families, and friends, can benefit from help and support. The American Cancer Society offers the Cancer Survivors Network (CSN), a safe place to connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. We also partner with CaringBridge, a free online tool that helps people dealing with illnesses like cancer stay in touch with their friends, family members, and support network by creating their own personal page where they share their journey and health updates.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html)
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Last Revised: November 16, 2018

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