



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 trouble.
biopsy	The removal of a small bit of the lump or tumour which is examined under a microscope to 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.

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.

Understanding cancer talk

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

Treatment related words

adjuvant therapy	After surgery removes or reduces cancer, treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy are offered.
alopecia	Medical word 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 reduce feelings of sickness (nausea) and vomiting (spewing).
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 transplant	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 therapies	Therapies that can be used with regular cancer treatments. For example, massage, music therapy, meditation.

cycles	Chemo is normally given at regular intervals. Each one of these is called a cycle. It is followed by a period of time during which the body recovers.
genetics	The study of heredity and the way a parent passes certain genes on to their children.
intravenous or IV	An intravenous drip gives fluid directly into a vein. Generally the IV 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 (spew). 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 palliative care 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 arm, leg or breast.
radiotherapy (radio/radiation therapy)	This is 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.
transplant	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

You will hear doctors use these words during treatment.

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 treating hormone disorders of 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 who specialises in treating diseases of 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 specialist doctor who prescribes radiotherapy and organises the treatment.
surgeon	A doctor who removes cancer from the body.

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.

This information has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a Clinical Advisory Group and an Indigenous Consultation Group. Production by Cancer Council.