

Cancer 101

BY REV. PERCY MCCRAY

CANCER FACTS

Every cancer journey is unique.

What is true for one cancer patient may not be true for another, because different kinds of cancers grow in different ways and respond to different kinds of treatments.

Every year, there are advances in cancer treatment.

Particularly when diagnosed early, cancer can often be treated successfully. More people than ever before are enjoying normal lives after cancer treatment.

Cancer is a cluster of cells growing out of control.

This can occur in any part of the body. As these rogue cells grow and multiply, they begin to interfere with the development of normal cells and can spread to other parts of the body. Cancer is measured in “stages”—stage I or II often means the cancer has not spread beyond the site of origin, while stage III or IV may mean the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. (Stage IV is the most advanced stage.)

The risk of getting some types of cancer may be reduced.

The risk of developing each type of cancer and each person’s individual risk may vary depending on lifestyle and environmental factors. For example, cigarette smoking can cause cancer. Moderate to heavy alcohol consumption has also been associated with certain cancers. Too much time in the sun without protection can cause skin cancer. In addition, physical exercise and healthy eating may reduce cancer risk. In the United States, one out of five cancer cases are preventable because they are related to being overweight, being physically inactive, excessive use of alcohol, and/or poor nutrition.

TERMS TO KNOW

Smoking is harmful.

One significant step in preventing certain types of cancers involves not smoking cigarettes—and avoiding exposure to secondhand smoke. Smoking accounts for about one in three cancer deaths in the United States.

Ultraviolet light is dangerous.

Since the ultraviolet (UV) rays in sunlight, sun lamps and tanning beds can cause skin cancer, it's wise to stay out of the midday sun, to wear a hat and sunglasses in the sun, and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30.

Nutrition can have a significant impact.

A diet that can lower cancer risk consists of plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits (at least 2½ cups a day) and whole grains (not refined grains and sugars). Red meats (beef, pork and lamb) should be limited, and processed meats (bacon, deli meats and hot dogs) should be avoided. Alcohol should be limited to one drink or less a day for women and two or less for men. Overeating should be curtailed to maintain a healthy weight.

Cancer can be caused by things that cannot be controlled.

Age increases risk—nearly 90 percent of cancer patients are over the age of 50. Cancer can be inherited—more than 5 percent of cancers are linked to genes passed down from previous generations. Some cancers are caused by viruses and infections.

There are a few myths about cancer as well.

Medical science has not found that injuries, bruises, broken bones or burns cause cancer. Sugar does not appear to affect cancer, although the added calories can cause weight gain, which is linked to cancer. Stress and certain personality types can have an effect on the immune system, but there is no evidence that emotional stress causes cancer.

Cancer is not contagious.

You can't catch cancer from someone else who has it. If you visit someone with cancer, don't be afraid to touch them. This is a time when they may need the support of family and friends.

Benign means a tumor has no harmful effect.

Biopsy is an examination of tissue removed from the body to analyze the presence, cause and/or extent of disease.

Malignant means the cells are cancerous.

Metastasis or **metastasis** is a migration of cancer cells to other organs or parts of the body.

Oncologist is a doctor who specializes in cancer treatment.

Remission is a period of time when the cancer is responding to treatment or is under control.

Cured means the disease, condition or injury has been eliminated with medical treatment.

Facts, statistics and clinical information for this article were drawn from the American Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-basics.html>



CANCER TREATMENTS

Cancer can be treated in different ways.

Doctors will determine the appropriate treatment plan based upon the type of cancer, its location, its stage, the health of the patient, and sometimes the preferences of the patient. Depending on the treatment, side effects often have to be considered.

Surgery can be used to cut out the cancer.

When the cancer is localized—such as some forms of skin cancer—the cancer and surrounding tissue often can be removed. For breast cancer, the affected part of the breast may be removed. For prostate cancer, the prostate gland may be removed. Other treatments may be indicated after surgery, depending on the patient.

Cancer cells can be destroyed or their growth slowed by drugs.

This treatment is called chemotherapy (“chemo”). These drugs are injected into the bloodstream or swallowed in pill form, circulating throughout the body.

Cancer cells can also be destroyed or their growth slowed by radiation.

Radiation beams can be aimed at the cancer—like an X-ray—or the treatment can be planted inside the cancer in “seed” form, which emits radiation.

Cancer treatment often saves lives.

Although the side effects of the treatment sometimes may seem worse than the disease, untreated cancer often results in death. Even if the treatment will not cure the cancer, it may help people live longer or reduce their pain or other symptoms. And every year new discoveries and advances are being made in cancer treatment.

“More people than ever before are enjoying normal lives after cancer treatment.”

REV. PERCY MCCRAY



Rev. Percy McCray, Jr. has spent more than 20 years ministering to cancer patients and their caregivers at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA).

An ordained minister, Rev. McCray is a member of the U.S. Chaplain Association. He has been recognized as one of the “most influential African Americans in Lake County (IL)” by the Chicago People’s Voice newspaper for his religious and leadership roles within the community.

Health, Hope & Inspiration is a weekly podcast, sponsored by Cancer Treatment Centers of America®(CTCA), designed to help people find answers to questions about cancer, cancer prevention and overall healthy living. One of the greatest gifts a person can enjoy is good health. A well-rounded lifestyle is the product of physical, emotional and spiritual health. These three things are interdependent, and that is the message of *Health, Hope & Inspiration*, as well as the basis of the integrative approach at CTCA®.

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HEALTH, HOPE & INSPIRATION
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