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## If You Have Malignant Mesothelioma

If you or someone you know has just been diagnosed with

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.

**Blood tests:**

## Can the tumor be taken out?

Instead of using a staging system, most doctors talk about mesothelioma and offer treatment options based on whether the cancer can be removed with surgery.

If most, or maybe all of the cancer can be taken out, it's called **resectable**. If it cannot be, and surgery is not an option, it's called **unresectable**.

### *Questions to ask the doctor*

- Do you know the stage of the cancer?
- If not, how and when will you find out the stage of the cancer?
- Would you explain to me what the stage means in my case?
- Can the cancer be taken out with surgery?
- Based on what you know about the cancer, how long do you think I'll live?
- What will happen next?

## What kind of treatment will I need?

There are many ways to treat mesothelioma.

- Surgery and radiation are used to treat only the cancer. They do not affect the rest of the body. This is called local treatment.
- Chemo drugs go through the whole body. They can reach cancer cells anywhere in the body. They are called systemic treatment.

Doctors may use both local and systemic treatments to treat mesothelioma. The treatment plan that's best for you will depend on:

- Where the cancer is
- The stage of the cancer or whether it's resectable
- The type of mesothelioma
- The chance that a type of treatment will help
- Your age
- Other health problems you have
- Your feelings about the treatment and the side effects that may come with it



often the main treatment for mesothelioma that cannot be taken out with surgery.

Chemo is given in cycles or rounds. Each round of treatment is followed by a break. This gives the body time to recover. Most of the time, 2 or more chemo drugs are given. Treatment often lasts for many months.

### ***Side effects of chemo***

Chemo can make you feel very tired, sick to your stomach, and cause your hair to fall



### 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)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/clinical-trials.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/clinical-trials.html)
3. [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

## Words to know

**Biopsy** (BY-op-see): taking out a small piece of tissue or fluid to see if there are cancer cells in it

**Echocardiogram**: A test where a small wand is moved around on the skin of your chest over your heart. It gives off sound waves and picks up the echoes as they bounce off tissues. The echoes are made into a picture on a computer screen. These pictures can show if there's fluid around your heart or the lining is thicker than it should be.

**Lymph nodes** (limf nodes): Small, bean-shaped sacs of immune system tissue found all over the body and connected by lymph vessels; also called lymph glands.

**Metastasis** (muh-TAS-tuh-sis): cancer cells that have spread from where they started to other places in the body

## How can I learn more?

We have a lot more information for you. You can find it online at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)<sup>3</sup>. Or, you can call our toll-free number at 1-800-227-2345 to talk to one of our cancer information specialists.



Last Revised: November 16, 2018

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