

Gastrointestinal Cancers

(Cancer of the stomach or food pipe)



Your **stomach** is where your food is digested.



Your **food pipe** is a tube that runs from your mouth to your stomach.

It is sometimes called the **oesophagus**.



Cancer is an illness that starts inside your body.

Tiny cells start to grow out of control and damage healthy parts of your body.



Cancer of the stomach and cancer of the food pipe are known as **gastrointestinal cancers**.



These cancers are not as common as other types of cancer.

But they are very serious.



Many people die from cancer of the stomach and cancer of the food pipe every year.



You are more likely to get cancer of the stomach or food pipe if:

- You are a man.



- You are aged 55 or over.



- You smoke.



- You do not eat enough fibre.

Fibre is found in foods like wholegrain breakfast cereals, fruit and vegetables



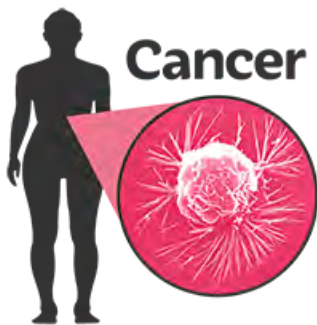
- You eat a lot of red meat, fatty food, processed foods, salty food, or pickled food.



- You have a stomach infection caused by a type of bacteria called helicobacter pylori (H. pylori).



- Your parents, brother or sister have had stomach cancer.



- You have already had another type of cancer.



- You are **anaemic**.

This means not having enough red blood cells in your blood, which makes you feel tired and out of breath.



- You have a stomach ulcer.



- You have had an operation on your stomach.



A healthy lifestyle can help you reduce your risk of getting cancer.

You should:



- Stop smoking (if you smoke).



- Eat a healthy balanced diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables.



- Keep active by doing things like walking and swimming.



- Do not drink too much alcohol.



- Do not eat too many pickled foods, smoked meat, or salty foods.



What are the symptoms of Gastrointestinal Cancers?

Symptoms are signs that show that something is wrong.

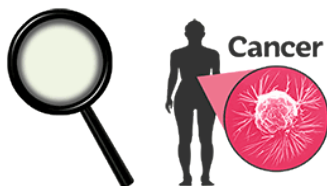


The symptoms of gastrointestinal cancer are easy to mistake for other, less serious things.



If you have any of these symptoms, you should see a doctor as soon as possible.

You probably don't have cancer, but it is important to get a doctor to check.



The earlier doctors find cancer, the more likely they will be able to treat the cancer.

This will give you the best chance of getting better.

Early symptoms include:



- **Indigestion** that does not go away.

Indigestion feels like a burning in the chest, stomach or back.



X3

If you have had indigestion most days for 3 weeks go to the doctor straight away.



- **Heartburn** that does not go away.

Heartburn is a painful burning feeling in your chest.



X3

If you have had heartburn most days for 3 weeks go to the doctor straight away.



- Burping or farting a lot.



- Feeling very full and bloated after meals.



- Feeling or being sick.



- Having pain or feeling uncomfortable in the top of your stomach.



- Feeling like food is sticking in your throat when you swallow.



Symptoms that you see once the cancer has been there a while include:

- Blood in your poo, or black poo.



- Losing your appetite (not feeling hungry).



- Losing weight for no reason.



- Feeling tired.



- Lumps or swelling in your stomach.



- Becoming **anaemic**.

This means not having enough red blood cells in your blood, which makes you feel tired and out of breath.



- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn a yellow colour.

This is called **jaundice**.



Testing To See If You Have Cancer

If your doctor thinks that you might have cancer they will send you to see another doctor.



This doctor will be a specialist in cancer.

They are called an **oncologist**.



X2

You should get to see them within 2 weeks.



The oncologist will do more tests to see if you have cancer.

This might include:

- A blood test.



- A chest x-ray.



- Checking a sample of your poo.



- An endoscopy or ultrasound.

These are ways of looking inside your stomach.

Further Tests



If the tests show that you have got cancer, you might need more tests.

These tests will help the doctors to decide what treatment you should have. The tests might include...



- A laparoscopy. This is a way of looking closely inside your stomach.



- Scans. Lots of x-ray images of your body are taken and put together to make a picture of the inside of your body.

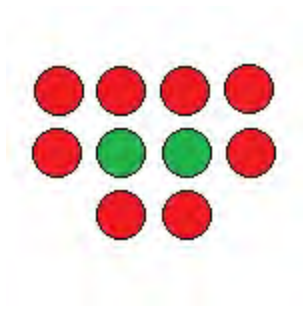


Treatment and Care

Sometimes the cancer can be cured (made to go away).



This means that after treatment you will get better.



Out of every 10 people with stomach cancer, 2 or 3 people will have their cancer cured.

But often the cancer cannot be cured.



Doctors will then use treatment to stop the cancer from growing any bigger.

They will try to help you feel a bit better.



The main treatments for stomach cancer are:

- Having an operation.



- Chemotherapy.



- Radiotherapy.



You might have one of these treatments or a mixture of them.



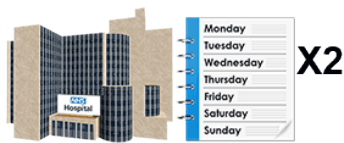
Having an operation

Sometimes you can have an operation to take some or all of the cancer away.



During the operation, doctors might need to take away the inside of some, or all, of your stomach.

This is called a **gastrectomy**.



The operation is a big one.

You will have to stay in hospital for around 2 weeks.



You will need to rest at home for a few more weeks afterwards.



Having chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses medicines to stop cancer growing.



Chemotherapy can be given in a few different ways, such as taking tablets or having the medicine injected through a drip.



You usually need to have chemotherapy quite a few times, about once every 3 weeks.



Chemotherapy can make you feel unwell.

You might:

- Feel tired.



- Feel sick and dizzy.



- Have your hair fall out.



- Lose weight.



- Have painful, red, swollen, or tingling hands and feet.



Having radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses beams of energy to destroy cancer cells.

You will lie under a machine for a few minutes.



The machine sends energy called radiation to your stomach.

You will need to go to hospital to have radiotherapy.



You will need to go 5 times a week for between 1 and 5 weeks.



Radiotherapy is not painful. But after having radiotherapy you might:

- Feel tired.



- Feel sick and dizzy.



- Have runny poo and need to rush to the toilet.



Have sore skin on your tummy.



Who will provide treatment and care?

There are lots of different people who will help you.

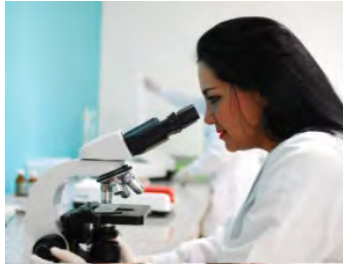
This can include:



- A surgeon. This is a doctor who does operations.



- An oncologist. This is a special doctor who treats cancer.



- A pathologist. This is a special doctor who is an expert on diseased tissue.



- A radiologist. This is a specialist in radiotherapy.



- A dietician. They can help you with eating a good diet.



- A social worker. They can help you with practical things.



- A psychologist. They can help you with your emotions and feelings.



- A specialist cancer nurse. They will help you with all of your care and treatment.



Living with Gastrointestinal Cancer

Living with cancer and the effects of surgery can be tough.

You can get support to help you.



[Macmillan cancer support](#) gives good information and support.



Talking to others can help.

You can talk to family and friends.

You might want to talk to someone like a counsellor.



You might like to talk to other people with cancer. Ask your doctor for information.



After treatment you will need time to get better.

Take time to rest and do not do too much.



After your treatment is finished you will need to go for regular check-ups.



If you've had an operation to take away part or all of your stomach, you might not be able to eat properly for a while.



You might need to make some changes to what you eat and how much you eat.

Your care team will help you with this.



You might have to stop or do less paid work because you have cancer.

You should get sick pay from your employer. You might also be able to get other benefits to help you.



Speak to your social worker who can help you.



Dealing with Dying

If your cancer can't be cured, you will die.



Your doctor will give you support and medicines to help relieve your pain.

This is called **palliative care**.



Support is also available for your family and friends.