

Knowing the facts about your cancer and staying informed can help you to remain positive and to get the healthcare support that you need. This list of cancer terms is a tool to help you become familiar with some of the medical language that you may encounter during the course of your treatment.

Term	Definition
Adenocarcinoma (A-den-oh-KAR-sih-NOH-muh)	Cancer that starts in the cells of the lining in some internal organs.
Anemia (a-NEE-mee-a)	A condition characterized by an unusually low number of red blood cells.
Angiography (an-jee-AH-gruh-fee)	X-ray study of the blood vessels using a dye injection.
Antigen (an-ti-gen)	Substance found in the immune system that causes certain immune responses.
Bacteria (bak-TEER-ee-uh)	A group of single-cell microorganisms that may cause disease or infection.
Benign (beh-NINE)	Non-cancerous. Benign tumors do not spread, but may grow larger.
Biotherapy (BY-oh-LAH-jih-kul)	Treatment that helps the body's immune system to fight cancer or relieve side effects. Also known as immunotherapy, biological response modifier therapy, and BRM therapy.

Term	Definition
Biopsy (BY-op-see)	A procedure where cells or tissues are removed from the body and studied with a microscope by a pathologist.
Bone marrow (bone MAYR-oh)	Spongy tissue found in the center of most bones that produces blood cells and platelets.
Bone scan	Images of bones displayed on a computer screen or film. Radioactive material is injected into a blood vessel, captured by the bones, and read by a scanner.
Bronchoscopy (bron-KOS-koh-pee)	Examination of the trachea, air passages leading to the lungs, and lungs with a thin, tubular instrument that lights and magnifies the viewing area.
Cancer	A word used to describe diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control. Cancer cells may invade nearby tissues and can spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymphatic systems.
CBC test	Complete blood count test. A sample of blood is taken to observe the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Also known as a blood cell count test.
Cerebrospinal fluid (she-REE-broh-SPY-nul)	Fluid made by brain tissue found in the hollow spaces of the brain, spinal cord, and surrounding tissue. Also known as CSF.
Cervix (SER-viks)	Canal formed between the uterus and vagina.
Chemotherapy (KEE-moh-THAYR-uh-pee)	Drugs used as treatment to kill cancer cells.

Term	Definition
Cirrhosis (sur-OH-sis)	Chronic liver disease that replaces liver cells with scar tissue.
Colposcopy (kol-POSS-koh-pee)	Examination of the cervix and vagina using a colposcope, which lights and magnifies the viewing area.
Computed tomography scan (toh-MAH-gruh-fee)	Examination inside the body using a series of detailed pictures taken from different angles. Also known as CAT scan, CT scan, and computerized axial tomography scan.
Cystoscopy (siss-TOSS-koh-pee)	Study of the bladder and urethra using a thin, tube-like light and lens called a cystoscope.
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid, or the molecules of cells that contain information about the genes which are carried on to each generation.
Endocrine (EN-doh-krin)	Tissue that produces hormones that help other cells or organs function. This tissue can be found in the pituitary, thyroid, and adrenal glands.
Endometrial (EN-doh-MEE-tree-ul)	Refers to the tissue lining the uterus.
Endoscopy (en-DOSS-koh-pee)	Examination of the inside of the body with an endoscope, which lights and magnifies the viewing area.
ERCP	Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography. Examination with an endoscope of the pancreatic duct, bile duct, duodenal papilla, and gallbladder.

Term	Definition
Estrogen (ES-truh-jin)	Hormone that produces female sex characteristics, sometimes used to treat menopausal symptoms or osteoporosis and other conditions.
G-CSF	Granulocyte colony-stimulating factor. Stimulates the production of certain white blood cells called neutrophils.
Gallium scan	Examination used to find cancer cells or inflammation using a small amount of radioactive gallium injected into the vein and read by a scanner.
Gamma irradiation	High energy radiation used for therapy.
GI	Gastrointestinal, referring to intestines and stomach.
Hemoglobin (HEE-moh-GLOH-bin)	Material in red blood cells that carries oxygen from lungs to tissues.
Hepatocellular carcinoma (HEP-a-toe-SEL-yoo-ler KAR-sih-NOH-muh)	Most common type of liver tumor, a type of adenocarcinoma.
Hormonal therapy (hor-MOH-nul THAYR-uh-pee)	Treatment to change hormone levels in the body, sometimes using surgery to remove glands that make hormones. Also known as hormone treatment or endocrine therapy.
Human papilloma virus (HYOO-mun PA-pih-LOH-muh)	(HPV) Family of viruses that causes tissues or cells to grow abnormally, some of which increase the risk of developing cervical cancer.

Term	Definition
Immunotherapy (IH-myoo-noh-THAYR-uh-pee)	Treatment that helps the body’s immune system to fight cancer or relieve side effects. Also known as biological therapy, biotherapy, biological response modifier therapy, and BRM therapy.
Intravenous pyelography (IN-truh-VEE-nus py-uh-LAH-gruh-fee)	X-ray study of the bladder, kidneys, and ureters using a dye injected into a blood vessel. Also known as IVP.
IV—Intravenous (IN-truh-VEE-nus)	A process of delivering a liquid or material into a vein.
Jaundice (JAWN-dis)	Liver or bile duct disorder that causes skin and the whites of the eyes to turn yellow.
Laparoscopy (LA-puh-ROS-koh-pee)	Examination of the inside of the abdomen with a thin, tubular instrument that lights and magnifies the viewing area.
Leukemia (loo-KEE-mee-uh)	Cancer originating in tissue that forms blood and produces high numbers of blood cells.
Libido (lih-BEE-doh)	The desire for sex.
Lumpectomy (lum-PEK-toh-mee)	Surgical removal of a tumor and a small sample of surrounding normal tissue.
Lymph node (limf node)	The rounded mass of lymphatic tissue surrounded by a capsule of connective tissue. Lymph nodes filter lymph, or lymphatic fluid, and they store white blood cells. Also called lymph gland.

Term	Definition
Lymph node dissection (limf node dis-EK-shun)	Surgical removal of the lymph nodes, either regional (removing some) or radical (removing most or all).
Lymphoma (lim-FOH-muh)	Cancer in the cells of the immune system, either known as Hodgkin or Non-Hodgkin Lymphomas.
Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)	Procedure using a powerful magnet and radio waves to create detailed images of organs and tissue.
Malignant (muh-LIG-nunt)	Cancerous. Malignant tumors may spread and invade surrounding tissues.
Mammogram (MAM-o-gram)	Study of breast tissue using an X-ray.
Mastectomy (ma-STEK-toh-mee)	Surgical removal of the breast or largest amount of breast tissue possible.
Melanoma (MEH-luh-NOH-muh)	Skin cancer starting in the cells that produce melanin, most often within moles.
Metastasis (meh-TAS-tuh-sis)	The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. A tumor formed by cells that have spread is called a metastatic tumor or a metastasis.
Microorganism (MY-kroh-OR-guh-ni-sum)	Individual life form that can be viewed only with a microscope, including algae, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and certain viruses.

Term	Definition
Myeloma (MY-eh-LOH-muh)	Cancer found in plasma cells.
Needle biopsy	Tissue or fluid removal using a needle. Also known as fine-needle aspiration.
Nutritionist	Healthcare professional with training in nutrition who may help with dietary concerns.
Oncologist (on-KAH-loh-jist)	A doctor who specializes in cancer treatment.
Oncology nurse (on-KAH-loh-jee)	A nurse who specializes in caring for cancer patients.
Ovaries (OH-vuh-rees)	Female reproductive glands that form eggs, located on both sides of the uterus.
Palliative therapy (PA-lee-uh-tiv)	Treatment to lessen suffering and relieve symptoms of cancer.
Pancreas (PAN-cree-us)	Organ in the abdomen that makes insulin and contains enzymes which help with digestion.
Pap test	Screening to detect cancer by removing cells from the cervix and viewing under a microscope. Also known as a Pap smear.

Term	Definition
Pathologist (puh-THAH-loh-jist)	A doctor who identifies and studies diseases by looking at tissues and cells through a microscope.
PET scan	Positron emission tomography scan. Injection of radioactive glucose (sugar) into a vein, where a scanner makes images of how the body and potential cancer cells use the glucose.
Photodynamic therapy (FOH-toh-dy-NA-mik)	Cancer treatment that uses drugs activated by light exposure to kill cancer cells.
Plasma (PLAZ-muh)	Clear, yellowish fluid in blood that carries blood cells and proteins.
Platelet (PLATE-let)	Blood cell that helps form blood clots and stop bleeding. Also known as thrombocyte.
Proctoscopy (prok-TOS-koh-pee)	Examination of the rectum with a proctoscope, which lights and magnifies the viewing area.
Palliative therapy (PA-lee-uh-tiv)	Treatment to lessen suffering and relieve symptoms of cancer.
Prostate (PROS-tayt)	Male reproductive system gland that produces part of the semen.
Prostatectomy (PROS-tuh-TEK-toh-mee)	Surgical removal of some or all of the prostate. Radical prostatectomy is total removal of the prostate plus surrounding tissue.

Term	Definition
Proton (PRO-tawn)	A positively charged particle of matter within atoms of elements sometimes used for radiation treatment.
Radiation Therapy (RAY-dee-AY-shun)	The use of high energy radiation to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors.
Radiofrequency ablation (RAY-dee-oh-FREE-kwen-see uh-BLAY-shun)	Process that destroys abnormal tissue with electrodes.
Remission (ree-MISH-shun)	The decrease in or disappearance of signs and symptoms of cancer.
Sarcoma (sar-KOH-muh)	Cancer found in the blood vessels, bone, cartilage, fat, muscle or other supporting tissue.
Sonogram (SAWN-o-gram)	High-energy sound waves that are bounced from tissues or organs and captured in a computer image.
Sputum cytology (SPYOO-tum sy-TAH-loh-jee)	Examination of the mucus and other matter produced from lungs to detect abnormal cells.
Squamous cell carcinoma (SKWAY-mus sel KAR-sih-NOH-muh)	Cancer which forms in the thin, flat cells found in skin tissue, the lining of hollow body organs, and the respiratory and digestive tract passages. Also known as epidermoid carcinoma.
Stem cell	A cell that develops into other cell types.

Term	Definition
Targeted therapy (THAYR-uh-pee)	Treatment that attacks cancer cells using drugs or other substances, avoiding normal cells.
Testosterone (tes-TOS-ter-own)	Hormone that produces male sex characteristics.
Transplantation	Procedure that replaces tissue with other tissue from the same body or another person's.
Tumor (TOO-mer)	Mass of tissue made by cells that do not die when scheduled or divide abnormally. Also called neoplasm. Tumors may be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).
Ultrasound (UL-truh-SOWND)	Procedure using high-energy sound waves bounced off organs or tissues to take pictures. Also known as ultrasonography.