



### What is cancer?

Cancer is not just one disease, but a group of over 200 different diseases. Cancer can develop in different parts of the body, like the lungs, skin or colon. The four most common cancer sites are lung, colorectal (colon and/or rectum), breast and prostate (a gland in the male reproductive system).

**Cancer** is an abnormal growth of cells. **Cells** are the tiny, basic building blocks of all living things.

All parts of the body, organs, muscles, skin, bones and blood, are made of cells. Cells are so small that over 50,000 cells can fit on the head of a pin!

Cancer happens when damaged cells grow and spread faster than healthy cells. The damaged cells crowd out normal cells.

Cells can be damaged by unhealthy behaviors like tobacco and alcohol use, lack of physical activity and an unhealthy diet.

### What causes cancer?

Cancer is a very complex disease. Doctors aren't always sure why some people get cancer and others don't.

They do know that tobacco use and an unhealthy diet are two of the biggest causes of cancer. Your chance of developing certain cancers also increases with age.

### How can I prevent cancer?

You can lower your chance of developing cancer by making healthy choices.

- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables
- Be active and have a healthy body weight
- Limit alcoholic drinks
- Do not smoke

# Cancer

## Are there screening tests that can prevent cancer or find it early?

Currently, not every cancer can be found at its earliest stage with a screening exam. **Cancer screening** is looking for cancer before a person has any symptoms. Several screening exams and procedures have been developed for some of the most common cancers, like colorectal, breast and cervical cancer.

Ask your health care provider about your cancer risk, symptoms to watch for and a schedule of cancer screening tests.

## How is cancer treated?

The most common treatments for cancer are surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. Cancer treatment and screening depends on:

- Type of cancer
- Stage of cancer (how far the cancer has spread)
- Your general health
- Your treatment goals

## Do people survive after being diagnosed with cancer?

The chances of living after being diagnosed with cancer depend on the cancer type, how far the cancer has spread (the stage) and many other factors. The sooner cancer is found and treatment begins, the better someone's chances are for a full recovery and cure.

In Wisconsin, two out of three people diagnosed with cancer survive at least five years.

## Where can I get more information?

The National Cancer Institute provides accurate and up-to-date information about clinical trials, cancer types, prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and end of life care.

**Phone:** 1-800-4CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

**Website:** [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)



**Carbone Cancer Center**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



[ruralcancernetwork.org](http://ruralcancernetwork.org)



**Cancer Health  
Disparities Initiative**

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