

Frequently asked questions about cancer

1. What is cancer?

All cells in the body keep multiplying throughout life. Normal cells multiply under control. Cancer cells lose this control and start multiplying more than required. These cells can damage the organ where the cell multiplication is occurring and can also spread to other sites.

2. In which part of my body can I get cancer?

Cancer can occur in any part of the body. They are usually painless and generally present as swellings or growths. They gradually increase in size and damage the surrounding tissue.

3. Can Cancer spread from one person to another?

Certainly not! Cancer is a non-communicable disease, which does not spread from one person to another. It occurs due to some changes in the cells due to which the cell multiplication becomes uncontrolled. Certain cancers may have a hereditary causation which means a person may be at higher risk of getting cancer if his/ her relatives have had that particular cancer. These cancers are breast, ovarian, colorectal, and other less common cancers

4. How does cancer spread?

As Cancer grows, it invades the surrounding structures and causes damage. It spreads to the draining lymph nodes. Through the blood stream it spreads to the others parts of the body like lung, liver, bones, brain etc.

5. What causes Cancer?

Exact cause of cancer is not yet known. However, there are certain risk factors, which may lead to cancer. Among the common factors Tobacco is an important factor. Nearly half of the cancers in India are due to tobacco.

Some common Risk factors for Cancer:

- **Tobacco:**
 - Smoking: Cigarette, Bidi, Cigar, Hukka, others
 - Smokeless: Zarda, Gutka, Khaini, Snuff, etc.
- **Alcohol**
- **Infections** (viruses, parasites, bacteria)
- **Diet** (dietary carcinogens)
- **Reproductive hormones**

6. Is Cancer a preventable Disease?

Yes, to a large extent. About 50% cancers are Tobacco related e.g. Lung Cancer, Cancer of Mouth, Cancer of the Voice box, Cancer of the Food pipe, etc.

Avoiding intake of Tobacco can prevent these cancers.

Certain cancers like the Cancers of the mouth, breast and cervix can be detected early and cured, if treated promptly. Therefore it is important to be aware of the early warning signals and consult a health professional

7. What are the signs and symptoms of Cancer?

Common symptoms of cancer are:

1. Lump or swelling
2. A sore that doesn't heal
3. Recent change in a wart/mole
4. Unusual bleeding or discharge
5. Changes in bladder or bowel habits
6. Nagging cough or hoarseness
7. Difficulty in swallowing or dyspepsia

8. Can cancer be cured?

Yes, Cancer can be cured if detected early and treated promptly. Unfortunately in India, about 70% patients present in advanced stage diseases, which have poor chances of survival.

9. How is cancer treated?

Cancer can be treated through Surgery, Radiation and drugs. Treatment generally requires more than one type of treatment like surgery with radiation or drugs, etc. To decide on the best treatment for a given patient, initial testing is done to make the diagnosis and determine how far the disease has progressed. Based on this the treatment is planned. The response of disease to treatment is assessed from time to time. The treatment generally needs to be given over a period of time. Once the planned treatment is completed, cancer patients need regular follow-up.

10. What can I do to prevent cancer?

- Avoid tobacco and alcohol
- Take healthy food
- Indulge in physical activity
- Be aware of your body so that you can detect any changes early
- Be alert for the warning signs of cancer

Contact a health professional immediately if you come across any suspicious symptom