



Cancer Tests & Diagnosis Glossary

The glossary has been developed by the Cancer Theme, of the Nuffield Department of Primary Health Care and Science, (NDPHCS, University of Oxford). The glossary aims to define, and clarify terms related to cancer testing and diagnosis. The information is presented in alphabetical order.

| Term | Definition |
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| Acute | A rapidly developing medical condition, such as an infection, as a result of cancer, or a type of quick progressing cancer like acute myeloid leukaemia. |
| Adjuvant therapy | Additional cancer treatment given after or alongside main treatment and normally after surgery to reduce chance of cancer returning. Adjuvant therapies can include chemotherapy, hormone, radiation and immunotherapy. |
| Benign tumour | Tumours that are made of slow growing cells that are not cancerous. |
| Biopsy | Removal of a small sample of cells to examine under a microscope for signs of cancer. |
| Blood count test | A blood test that checks the number of red and white blood cells and platelets. Abnormal levels, either too high or too low may need further investigations. |
| Cancer | Cancer occurs when a normal cell divides incorrectly Usually these cells are spotted and destroyed by our immune system. If they are not spotted, the cell with the incorrect details continues to multiply and divide, they replace the normal cells and can make it more difficult for the organ to work properly. These incorrect cells can break away and using the blood or the other fluid system (lymphatic) can spread to other parts of the body and grow there. |

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| Cancer cells | Cells that grow and divide uncontrollably, that can spread throughout the body, making it more difficult for the organs to work properly. |
| Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) | Nurses with specialism in cancer. Key role is to support, liaise with patient and their families and provide information. |
| Carcinoma | A type of cancer that begins in the skin or in tissue covering inside body organs. |
| Carcinoma in situ | Cancer that stays where it began and does not spread to other areas, tissues, or body parts. |
| Cervical screening (pap smear test) | A test that checks a sample of cells from the cervix for high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV) . HPV can damage cells and this sometimes leads to cancer developing. |
| Chemotherapy | Special anti -cancer medicines which are used to treat cancer. Several chemotherapy drugs are often combined to attack the cancer cells in different ways. |
| Clinical trials | Studies that people can participate in to test new cancer tests, medicines or treatments. |
| Computed Tomography (CT Scan) | Combines X-ray images to create detailed views of the body. |
| Colonoscopy | An internal exam of the bowels using a flexible camera, used to detect bowel cancer. |
| Cytology | Diagnostic process that examines cells collected using methods that do not require full surgery and can be completed in a shorter time-frame. This includes the pap smear for cervical cancer. |
| Digital rectal examination (DRE) | Can be used by a health care professional to examine problems and pain linked to the prostate or lower bowel. It involves a health professional inserting a finger into the back passage to feel for any changes in the bowel wall or prostate. |

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| False positive | A test result indicating that a person has a disease or condition when the person actually does not have the disease or condition. |
| False negative | A test result indicating incorrectly a person does not have specific disease or condition, but on further testing it is discovered they do have the specific disease or condition. |
| Grade | The grade is given to understand how large the cancer is in the organ it started, how many other places it has spread to, and if it is in the fluid system (lymphatic system). Cancers with a higher grade are more difficult to cure. |
| Histology | The study of tissue under a microscope, often used to classify type of cancer. |
| Hormone therapy | Some cancers rely on hormones to grow and survive in the body, so these treatments act on hormones to help slow or stop these cancers from growing. Before these treatments are given the cancer cells are tested to see if they will respond. |
| Leukaemia | Cancer of the white blood cells, which starts in the bone marrow and leads to over production of white blood cells. Leukaemia cells do not function as healthy cells and stop protecting against infections. |
| Lumpectomy | Procedure involving removal of part of the breast containing a tumour known or suspected to be cancerous. |
| Lymph | A clear, watery fluid that flows through its own vessels branching throughout the body. Lymph contain white blood cells, which fight germs. |
| Lymphoma | Type of blood cancer, where the white blood cells begin to grow abnormally and spread through the lymph vessels/system and beyond. Two major types of lymphoma are Hodgkin's disease and non-Hodgkin's. |
| Lymph nodes | Little round or bean-shaped bumps that can't be felt unless they become swollen. They contain lymphocytes, white blood cells that fight infection by filtering bacteria and germs. Lymph nodes get |

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| | bigger when they react with infections or cancer. Major lymph nodes can be are found in neck, armpit, chest, abdomen (belly area) and groin area. |
| Lymphatic system | Part of the immune system that includes lymph nodes and lymph vessels, and is important for fighting infections. |
| Lymphoedema | Swelling that develops due to a build-up of lymph fluid in the body's tissues. Lymphoedema occurs when lymphatic system is not working properly as it may be damaged by cancer, or treatments like surgery or radiotherapy. |
| Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) | Scan that uses magnets and radio waves to create detailed images, especially useful for soft tissues such as skin, muscles and cartilage. |
| Malignant tumour | A tumour that is not benign, but grows incorrectly, invading surrounding tissue, and may spread to other parts of the body (metastasis). |
| Metastasis | The spread of cancer from the original site to other parts of the body. |
| Negative result | A negative cancer test result means the specific cancer the diagnostic test was looking for was not found. Further diagnostic investigations maybe required. |
| Neo-adjuvant therapy | Neo-adjuvant treatments are those given before surgery. The aim is to shrink a cancerous tumour using drugs before surgery. These therapies can include chemotherapy or radiation therapy. |
| Oncologist | Specialist doctors who diagnose, assess, treat and manage patients with cancers. |
| Palliative care | Specialist physical, emotional and practical care provided to patients and their families to help them live as well as possible when their disease cannot be cured. Palliative care can last many years or used in the last few weeks and months of a person's life. |
| Pathology | The study of disease through the examination of organs, tissues, and bodily fluids. |
| Platelet | Platelets small blood cells (shaped like plates) whose job it is to come together in a group(s) or clump(s) to stop bleeding when you are injured or cut. |

| Term | Definition |
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| Positron Emission Tomography (PET Scan) | A scan that uses radioactive sugar and a special scanner to detect areas of high cell activity (often cancer). |
| Positive result | Indicates the possible presence of cancer. This does not mean that a patient has cancer. A positive blood test can return with a positive result for PSA, which will require further testing for prostate cancer. |
| Primary cancer site | The organ or area in the body where cancer begins. Type of cancer is always identified by its primary site, even it metastasizes, or spreads. For instance, if cancer begins in the liver but spreads to other organs, it is still classified as liver cancer. |
| Progression | When cancer spreads or becomes bigger it is called progression. |
| Prognosis | The likely course or outcome of the cancer, based on things like stage, available treatments and how well the person is before treatment starts. |
| Radiology | <p>Radiology is a branch of medicine which uses imaging technology to view structures within the body to diagnose, treat and monitor diseases and injuries.</p> <p>There are two types of radiology Diagnostic imaging uses ionising (X-rays) and non-ionising radiation (magnetic resonance and ultrasound) to diagnose symptoms, monitor treatment or screen for illnesses.</p> <p>Interventional radiology uses minimally invasive, image-guided techniques to provide medical treatments.</p> |
| Radiographer | Professionals primarily responsible for operating X-Ray equipment to produce high-quality diagnostic images that aid in the diagnosis of various patient conditions. They can specialise in certain areas of imaging, including sonography, MRI, mammography, computed tomography, nuclear medicine, DEXA scanning and vascular interventional radiography. |

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| Radiotherapy | <p>Radiotherapy is a treatment where radiation is used to kill cancer cells. Radiotherapy may be used in the early stages of cancer or after it has started to spread.</p> <p>It can be used to cure the cancer completely (curative radiotherapy), make other treatments like chemotherapy more effective and provide palliative relief.</p> |
| Recurrence | <p>Return of cancer after treatment and after a period of time during which the cancer cannot be detected. The patient would have previously been informed that they are free of the disease or that the disease is not detectable. The same cancer may come back where it first started or somewhere else in the body.</p> |
| Remission | <p>Refers to a point after cancer treatment when cancer has shrunk or there is no evidence from cancer tests of cancer.</p> |
| Secondary cancers | <p>When cancer cells break from the primary cancer and start to develop in a new area. Can also be referred to as metastases.</p> |
| Screening | <p>Testing for cancer in people without symptoms (e.g., mammogram, pap smear test, FIT test)</p> |
| Staging | <p>Testing to know how big the cancer is, where it started and if it has spread to other body parts. Gives it a number from stage 1 (earliest stage) to stage 4 (stage 4 meaning the cancer has spread to other body organs or parts) Some cancers like breast cancer can start at stage 0 (carcinoma in situ).</p> |
| Systemic therapy | <p>Drug therapies that work throughout the whole of the body. These include hormonal treatment, chemotherapy and immunotherapy. Systemic therapies can be given as injections, infusion, or oral medication. Systemic treatments can be used on their own or in combination with radiotherapy.</p> |

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| Targeted Therapy | Targeted cancer drugs work by 'targeting' the differences that help a cancer cell to survive and grow. They are one of the main treatments for some cancers. For example, advanced melanoma (a type of aggressive skin cancer) and some types of leukaemia. |
| Tissue | A collection of cells of the same type, which work together to perform a job and/or form a part of the body. |
| Tumour | A group of cells that aren't growing the way they should; these can either be benign (non-cancerous) or cancerous. |
| Tumour markers | Substances, usually proteins produced by the body that can be related to either cancer itself or to non-cancerous infections. For example, the protein PSA which can be raised in both prostate cancer and in non-cancerous infections of the prostate. The detection and measurement of tumour markers in blood plasma, urine or tissue can help to detect and aid diagnosis of some types of cancer, predict and monitor response to treatment and detect recurrence. |
| Tumour, Node and Metastases (TNM) staging system | Scoring system describing overall stage using tumour, node, and metastases. |
| Treatment Cycle | A period of treatment followed by a period of rest (no treatment) that is repeated on a regular schedule. For example, treatment given for one week followed by three weeks of rest is one treatment cycle. When this cycle is repeated multiple times on a regular schedule, it makes up a course of treatment. Also called cycle of treatment. |
| Ultrasound scan | Uses sound waves to produce images of internal organs and detect masses or abnormalities. |
| X-ray | A quick imaging test that uses radiation to view internal structures. |