

# A-Z Glossary: Common Terms for Metastatic Cancer



## A

- Ablation: Medical procedure to destroy cancer cells using heat.
- Advanced cancer: Cancer that has spread beyond the original site (e.g. breast) and locoregional lymph nodes to other parts of the body such as the liver, lungs, brain and bones.
- Advanced care planning: The process of thinking about and making aligned decisions about your future healthcare preferences based on your personal beliefs and values should you no longer be able to actively participate in decision-making due to illness or injury.
- Antiemetic: Medication that is used to help prevent or alleviate nausea and vomiting. A drug that helps to control nausea and vomiting.

## B

- Biopsy: The removal of cells or tissues for examination to determine if the tissue is affected by a disease. The removed cells or tissues are usually examined by a pathologist, who determines the presence or extent of a disease by studying the cells or tissues under a microscope. The pathologist may perform other tests on the removed cells or tissue. There are many different types of biopsy procedures. The most common types include (1) incisional biopsy, in which only a sample of tissue is removed; (2) excisional biopsy, in which an entire lump or suspicious area is removed; (3) needle biopsy, in which a sample of tissue or fluid is removed with a needle.

## C

- Cancer: Cancer is the term for a group of cells that displays uncontrolled growth (division beyond normal limits), invasion (intrusion on and destruction of adjacent tissues), and sometimes metastasis (spread to other locations in the body). Most cancers form a tumour (i.e. a lump or mass). However, some cancers, like leukaemia, do not. Oncology is the branch of medicine concerned with studying, diagnosing, treating, and preventing cancer.
- Cancer of Unknown Primary Origin: Is when the primary site of the diagnosed cancer cannot be determined.
- Central line: An intravenous catheter that is placed into a large vein (typically in the neck or chest) to provide direct access to the bloodstream for administering medications.

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- **Clinical Trial:** Also known as a treatment trial or clinical research study, are research trials that test new treatments, therapies, drugs or interventions.
- **Computed Tomography (CT) Scan:** The computed tomography (CT) scan is a medical imaging procedure that uses X-rays and digital computer technology to create detailed two- or three-dimensional images of the body.
- **Cytostatic Drugs:** Medications and treatments that inhibit or slow down the growth and division of cells, particularly rapidly dividing cells like cancer.
- **Cytotoxic drug:** Medication and treatments that kill or destroy rapidly dividing cells such as cancer cells.

## D

- **De Novo:** When metastatic cancer is described as de novo it refers to cancer that is diagnosed as metastatic from the time of first diagnosis.

## E

- **End-of-Life Care:** Care is given at the end of someone's life, usually within weeks of death.
- **Enduring Guardian:** A person you appoint to make important medical decisions on your behalf should you no longer have the capacity to do so.
- **Enduring Power of Attorney:** A legal document that gives your appointed guardian the authority to make financial, legal and medical decisions on your behalf.

## G

- **Genes:** Each cell in the human body contains thousands of genes. Genes carry information that determines traits such as blood type, hair colour, and eye colour. Traits are characteristics a person inherits from their parents. Parents pass on characteristics to their children through genes. Genes also determine a person's risk of developing certain hereditary or genetic diseases. Defective genes (or mutations) can also be inherited, and they may cause changes in certain body processes or functions that lead to genetic diseases. Diseases that run in families are often caused by genetic defects. A person may be born with a genetic makeup that makes him or her have a higher risk (or be more susceptible) to developing a certain condition.

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- **Gene Sequencing:** A combination of laboratory procedures used on a segment(s) of DNA to identify the nucleotide sequence.
- **Genetic Counselling:** A communication process between a specially trained healthcare provider and a person interested in understanding his or her genetic risk of developing a specific hereditary or genetic disease. The person's family and personal medical history may be discussed, and counselling may lead to genetic testing.
- **Genetic Counsellor:** Professionals with specialised graduate degrees and experience in medical genetics and counselling. Genetic Counsellors work as members of a health care team and act as patient advocates as well as genetic resources to primary care physicians, other clinicians, and families. Counsellors assist in the identification of families at risk for birth defects or a genetic condition, disorder, or syndrome. Additionally, Genetic Counsellors investigate the problems present in the family, interpret genetic information, analyse inheritance patterns and risks of recurrence, and review with families the available testing options.
- **Genetic Testing Tests** that involve analysing DNA to look for a genetic alteration that may indicate an increased risk of developing a specific disease or disorder.
- **Gleason Score:** A grading system used to evaluate the aggressiveness of prostate cancer.
- **Gynaecologic Oncologist:** A Gynaecologic Oncologist is an obstetrician/gynaecologist who specialises in diagnosing and treating women with cancer of the reproductive organs. Specifically, the Gynaecologic Oncologist treats cancer of the ovary, endometrium, uterus, cervix, vagina, vulva and trophoblastic disease.
- **Gynaecologist:** A Gynaecologist specialises in the branch of medicine that deals with the diseases and routine physical care of women's reproductive system.

## H

- **Hickman Line:** This is a long-term IV catheter that is inserted into a large vein. It is used for delivering medications such as chemotherapy.
- **Hematoma:** Blood pooling beneath the skin, creating a bruise or swelling.
- **Hospice:** Hospice is a place that provides comprehensive support, comfort and healthcare to individuals who are nearing the end of their lives due to terminal illnesses.
- **Hysterectomy:** A hysterectomy is the surgical removal of the uterus. It may also involve removal of the cervix, ovaries, fallopian tubes and other surrounding structures.



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## I

- Irresectable: See unresectable.

## L

- Line of Treatment: The specific phase or sequence of treatments a person may undergo during their cancer journey. Cancer treatment can involve multiple lines of treatment, each with a distinct goal.

## M

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): Magnetic Resonance Imaging is a technique for looking for abnormalities such as cancer using magnetic fields. Breast MRI is typically recommended as a screening tool for breast cancer in high-risk women and is often used to follow up on a breast abnormality seen on a mammogram.
- Malignant: Cancerous tumours which can spread to other sites.
- Mastectomy: The surgical removal of the whole breast (or as much of the breast tissue as possible) typically to rid the body of cancer.
- Multidisciplinary team (MDT): The team of medical professionals across different specialities that come together to discuss and plan treatment for patients.

## O

- Oophorectomy: Surgical procedure to remove the ovary/ovaries.

## P

- Palliative Care Nurse: A registered nurse who is trained and experienced in providing care to patients with serious, life-limiting or terminal illnesses.
- Palliative Care Physician: a medical doctor who specialises in providing comprehensive and holistic care to patients with serious, life-limiting, or terminal illnesses.
- Palliative Care Unit: A specialised healthcare facility that provides care to patients with serious, life-limiting or terminal illnesses. Care focuses on addressing physical symptoms, managing pain, providing emotional support, and ensuring a peaceful environment during the final stages of life.
- PET scan: Positron Emission Tomography is a medical imaging technique that involves injection with radioactive glucose to help diagnose tumours.
- Prostatectomy: A surgical procedure in which the prostate gland is partially or completely removed.

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## R

- Randomised controlled trial (RCT): Scientific research that evaluates the effects of an experimental treatment in which the participants are randomly assigned to treatment or control groups.
- Recurrent Cancer: Cancer that reappears weeks, months or even years after the primary cancer was treated and believed to be cured. It can recur in the same location or another part of the body.

## S

- Salpingectomy: The removal of the fallopian tubes.
- Salpingectomy-Oophorectomy (SO): The removal of the fallopian tubes and ovaries.
- Secondary Cancer: Also known as metastatic cancer, refers to cancer that has spread from its original site to distant organs of the body.
- Seroma: Fluid that collects in or around a scar after surgery.
- Staging: The process of classifying the extent and spread of cancer within the body helps direct treatment decisions.
- Systemic Treatment: Treatments designed to target cancer cells throughout the body, including primary sites, metastatic sites and any undiagnosed sites of cancer.
- Symptoms: The feelings or changes in the body caused by treatment or illness, such as pain, tiredness, weight loss, swelling or lumps etc.

## T

- Terminal: Cancer that is in an advanced stage and is expected to lead to the person's death.
- Tolerance: Level of treatment or medication the body can withstand and adapt to. It may also be used in the context that the body is no longer responding to the current dose, and this needs increased.
- Tumour: A tumour is an abnormal growth of body tissue. Tumours can be cancerous (malignant) or noncancerous (benign). Cancerous tumours have uncontrolled growth and spread to other parts of the body. Non-cancerous tumours usually do not grow or spread.

## U

- Ultrasound: Diagnostic ultrasound, also called sonography or diagnostic medical sonography, is an imaging method that uses high-frequency sound waves to produce relatively precise images of structures within your body.
- Unresectable: A tumour or cancerous growth that cannot be completely removed through surgical procedures.