



Education

Stomach Cancer (Gastric Cancer)

What is stomach cancer?

Stomach cancer, also called gastric cancer, is the abnormal growth of cells in the inner lining of the stomach.

How does it occur?

Several conditions may increase the risk of stomach cancer. For example:

- infection of the stomach with bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori)
- chronic gastritis (inflammation of the stomach)
- being male or older than 60
- a diet high in salted, smoked, or poorly preserved foods and low in fruits and vegetables
- a mother, father, sister, or brother who has had stomach cancer
- pernicious anemia, which is a low count of red blood cells caused by a lack of vitamin-B12.

What are the symptoms?

People who have stomach cancer have very few symptoms until late in the disease. Some possible symptoms of stomach cancer are:

- heartburn or indigestion
- stomach pain
- nausea or vomiting
- a sense of fullness after eating small amounts of food
- loss of appetite
- weight loss.

How is it diagnosed?

Stomach cancer is hard to find in its early stages because it causes few or no symptoms. Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and examine you. A sample of a bowel movement may be tested for blood.

Other tests may include an upper GI x-ray, for which you swallow barium. The barium coats the stomach lining and makes the stomach easier to see on x-ray film. You will also have a procedure called an endoscopy, where a slim, flexible, lighted tube is passed through your mouth and down into your stomach. This tube, called an endoscope, allows your health care provider to look in the stomach for abnormal areas. Your provider can use the scope to take a piece of abnormal tissue for lab tests. This is called a biopsy.

More possible tests are:

- blood tests
 - CT scan of the abdomen and pelvis.
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How is it treated?

The treatment depends on how far along the cancer is and if it has spread. Treatment may include:

- surgery to remove part or all of the stomach
- chemotherapy to kill the cancer cells with drugs
- radiation therapy to kill cancer cells in the stomach.

If the tumor is blocking the opening to the stomach but the cancer cannot be completely removed with standard surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation therapy, the following procedures may be used:

- placement of a thin, expandable tube (called a stent) from the esophagus to the stomach to keep the opening from closing
- endoscopic laser surgery, which uses an endoscope and laser to remove the blockage
- electrocautery, which uses an electrical current to create heat and remove tissue or control bleeding.

How long will the effects last?

The cancer may be curable if it is caught early and has not spread through the stomach lining. The cancer is usually not curable if it has spread beyond the stomach lining. Ask your health care provider what you can expect with the stage of cancer that you have.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your health care provider.
- Get a diet plan from a dietitian so you can have a healthy diet even if there are some foods you cannot eat.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Ask your provider to recommend appropriate exercise and activities.
- Join a cancer support group.
- Be open with your family and your health care providers about your concerns.
- Find a counselor to help you deal with difficult issues.
- Spend time with people and in activities you like.

For more information, contact:

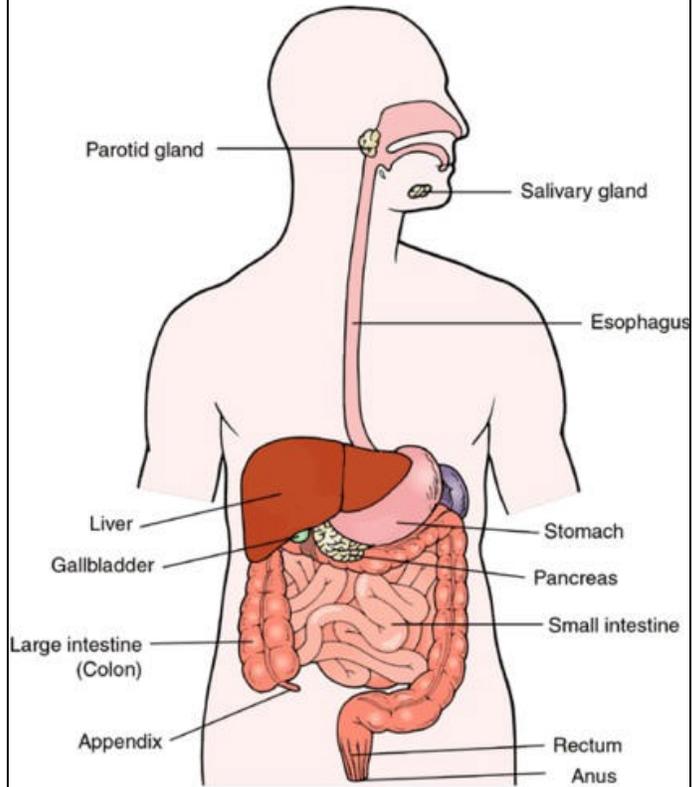
- American Cancer Society, Inc. Phone: 800-ACS-2345 (800-227-2345) Web site: <http://www.cancer.org>
- AMC Cancer Research Center and Foundation Phone: 800-525-3777 Web site: <http://www.amc.org>
- National Cancer Institute Phone: 800-4-CANCER (800-422-6237) Web sites: <http://cis.nci.nih.gov> and <http://www.cancer.gov>

How can I help prevent stomach cancer?

Follow the treatment prescribed by your health care provider if you have been diagnosed with pernicious anemia, gastritis, or H. pylori.

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Digestive System



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